



# Child Soldiers – Implications for U.S. Forces Seminar Report

September 23, 2002



Prepared by the  
**Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities**

3087 Roan Avenue, Building 3087-C Quantico VA 22134 703-784-0452 [www.ceto.quantico.usmc.mil](http://www.ceto.quantico.usmc.mil)

# Child Soldiers – Implications for U.S. Forces Seminar Report

## September 23, 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	
BACKGROUND: SETTING THE SCENE.....	
Child Soldiers: An Emerging Threat.....	
Panelists and Issues Addressed.....	
MAIN POINTS FROM THE PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION.....	
Why Children Are Recruited.....	
How Children Are Recruited.....	
Facilitators For The Recruitment Of Child Soldiers.....	
Failed States.....	
Advances In technology.....	
Small Arms Trade.....	
Implications On The Battlefield.....	
Increased Lethality.....	
Laws Of War.....	
Demoralizing Effects.....	
What Can Be Done – International Initiatives.....	
United Nations.....	
International Criminal Court.....	
International Sanctions And Embargoes.....	
What Can Be Done – Local Initiatives.....	
Gaining Rebel Army Cooperation.....	
Birth Records.....	
What Can Be Done – Military Initiatives.....	
Elimination Of Adult Leadership.....	
Fighting At A Distance And Firing For Shock.....	
Elimination Of Recruitment Zones.....	
Non-Lethal Weapons.....	
Public Affairs.....	
Prisoners And Escapees.....	
Intelligence.....	
Demobilization.....	
Communicate Agreements.....	
Post-Conflict Treatment.....	
More Challenges.....	
Reintegration.....	
HIV/AIDS.....	
RECOMMENDATIONS ON FUTURE EFFORTS.....	
Doctrine.....	
Training.....	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	
ATTACHMENT A PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES.....	
ATTACHMENT B MS KATI MARTON’S PREPARED REMARKS.....	
ATTACHMENT C SUMMARY OF MR ISHMAEL BEAH’S PRESENTATION.....	
ATTACHMENT D SUMMARY OF MR IAIN LEVINE’S PRESENTATION.....	
ATTACHMENT E MS JO BECKER’S PREPARED REMARKS.....	
ATTACHMENT F DR PETER SINGER’S BRIEFING SLIDES.....	
ATTACHMENT G DR PETER SINGER’S PAPER “CAUTION: CHILDREN AT WAR” .....	
ATTACHMENT H SUMMARY OF MAJOR JAMES GRAY’S PRESENTATION....	
ATTACHMENT I MAJOR JAMES GRAY’S BRIEFING SLIDES.....	
ATTACHMENT J OPTIONAL PROTOCOL ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT.....	

## Executive Summary

The Child Soldier Phenomenon has become a post-Cold War epidemic that has proliferated to every continent with the exception of Antarctica and Australia. The United Nations estimates that at least 300,000 boys and girls under the age of 18 are under arms fighting as soldiers and also serving as spies, informants, couriers, and sex-slaves in the 30-plus conflicts around the globe.

Not only have US forces faced child soldiers in the past, it is nearly inevitable that they will face them again in the future. If a 14-year-old points a weapon at a US serviceman, what should he do? No Marine, no soldier, sailor, or airman wants to kill a 14-year-old. But a 14-year-old with an AK47 is just as deadly as a 40-year-old with an AK47. If one hesitates, he and his buddies might be killed; if he shoots, then he might have to deal with the potential psychological consequences of killing a child. This presents a terrible dilemma in terms of balancing the Rules of Engagement and self-protection with traditional American cultural and social values concerning children. The question is, **“How will US forces deal with it?”**

On June 11, 2002 the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities (CETO) conducted a seminar on ***Child Soldiers – Implications for US Forces*** to help raise awareness throughout the Marine Corps about this emerging threat and to identify solutions to better prepare Marines for when they encounter child soldiers in the future.

This report provides information on the Child Soldier Phenomenon, including:

- Background to set the scene around the globe.
- Discussion of why and how child soldiers are recruited.
- Explanation of those things that facilitate the recruitment of child soldiers, such as failed states, advances in technology, and the small arms trade.
- Implications of child soldiers on the battlefield, such as increased lethality, lack of understanding or following of the laws of war, and demoralizing effects fighting child soldiers have on professional military forces.

This report also suggests potential initiatives for eliminating the use of child soldiers, and for engaging them and exploiting their weaknesses:

- International initiatives to eliminate the use of child soldiers include implementation of the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*, support for the International Criminal Court, and enforcement of sanctions and embargoes.
- Local initiatives to eliminate the use of child soldiers such as gaining rebel army cooperation and working with local governments to register children at birth.
- Military initiatives to engage forces manned with child soldiers and exploit their weaknesses include:

- Eliminating the adult leadership of child soldier units.
- Holding the child soldier threat at a distance and firing for shock.
- Securing the most likely locations where child soldiers are recruited.
- Exploring options for using non-lethal weapons.
- Protecting child soldiers, once demobilized, from the local population and protecting demobilization centers from rebel groups and armies.
- Preparing US forces for the kind of environment they will face before they deploy and to cope with the trauma they may experience when they redeploy.

Most importantly, this report highlights that the Marine Corps needs to include training on child soldiers in its schools and pre-deployment efforts.

## **Background: Setting the Scene**

In January 2002, Special Forces Sergeant Nathan Chapman was the first US serviceman killed by hostile fire in Afghanistan. This incident was noteworthy because, as reported widely in the media but not confirmed by the Defense Department, he was killed by a 14-year-old Afghan boy.

In September 2000, an elite British strike force rescued a six-man patrol of the Royal Irish Regiment. The patrol had been on a training mission in Sierra Leone when it was captured by a rogue militia group. What was significant about this operation was that the enemy was made up of mostly children. In fact, the patrol had been captured when the patrol's commander was unwilling to fire on "children armed with AKs."<sup>1</sup>

The Child Soldier Phenomenon has become a post-Cold War epidemic that has proliferated to every continent with the exception of Antarctica and Australia. The United Nations estimates that at least 300,000 boys and girls under the age of 18 are under arms fighting as soldiers and also serving as spies, informants, couriers, and sex-slaves in the 30-plus conflicts around the globe.

According to Human Rights Watch, the biggest culprit today in recruiting child soldiers is the Burmese Army which includes approximately 70,000 child soldiers in its ranks (one out of every four child soldiers worldwide), of which 10-15 percent are under the age of 15.

Another government that uses child soldiers extensively, second only to Burma is the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). During the 1996-97 war between the DRC and its neighbors, the DRC under Laurent Kabila had around 30,000 child soldiers in its military, with 15-30 percent of all new recruits being under the age of 18. Kabila's son Josef has pledged and made some efforts to move away from using child soldiers. Rebels opposing the DRC, however, still widely recruit from the ranks of the country's children. Neighboring countries such as Uganda and Rwanda have been known to

---

<sup>1</sup> P. W. Singer. "Caution: Children At War," *Parameters*, Winter 2001-2002.

facilitate the practice of recruiting child soldiers by allowing training camps to be set up within their borders, offering up trainers for rebel groups, and turning a blind eye to the age of the soldiers trained.

The most brutal recruitment and brainwashing of child soldiers had been carried out by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel Ugandan militia operating in Sudan and Uganda. Both the RUF and the LRA threatened and carried out mutilations and murders against the children they recruited as punishment for the least disobedience. They also obliged child soldiers to maim and kill other children as a means of brainwashing them and of ensuring their loyalty with an unquestioning willingness to kill. The RUF has been put out of business, but the LRA is still operating and reportedly is using several thousand Ugandan children inside of Southern Sudan.

Child soldiers were active in every part of Colombia's armed conflict before December 1999 – as part of the national armed forces, the government-linked paramilitaries, and guerrilla forces. However, in part as a result of heightened international awareness about the child soldier issue, in 1999 the government raised its recruitment age to 18 and began demobilizing children in its ranks. Children still make up a significant portion of guerrilla forces and paramilitaries, however, and there are probably 6,000-10,000 children currently fighting. The guerrillas refer to child soldiers as “little bees” for the ability and power to sting. The paramilitaries call them “little bells” because they are deployed in front to draw fire, detect traps, and serve as an early warning system. In the cities, child members of militaries are called “little carts” because they ferry drugs and weapons without raising suspicion.

### **Child Soldiers: An Emerging Threat**

Not only have US forces faced child soldiers in the past (Germany, Vietnam, Somalia, and Afghanistan), it is nearly inevitable that they will face them again in the future. If a 14-year-old points a weapon at a US serviceman or woman, what should he or she do? No Marine, no soldier, sailor, or airman wants to kill a 14-year-old. But a 14-year-old with an AK47 is just as deadly as a 40-year-old with an AK47. If one hesitates, he and his buddies might be killed; if he shoots, then he might have to deal with the potential psychological consequences of killing a child. This presents a terrible dilemma in terms of balancing the Rules of Engagement and self-protection with traditional American cultural and social values concerning children. The question is, “**How will US forces deal with it?**”

On Tuesday, June 11, 2002, the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities (CETO) conducted a daylong seminar on ***Child Soldiers – Implications for US Forces***<sup>2</sup> at Liversedge Hall, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Virginia. The purpose of the seminar

---

<sup>2</sup> For an electronic copy of this seminar report along with speaker biographies, summaries of their presentations, or copies of their texts and briefing slides, where available, see <http://ceto.quantico.usmc.mil/>. Copies of a video recording of the seminar and of the videos played during the seminar also are available by contacting CETO at 703 784-0450/52.

was to help raise awareness of the Child Soldier Phenomenon throughout the Marine Corps about this emerging threat and to identify solutions to better prepare Marines for when they encounter child soldiers in the future.

CETO is a think tank dedicated to developing new ideas for the Marine Corps.<sup>3</sup> It attempts to look into emerging threats and opportunities and develop strategies to thwart or exploit them. **The child soldier issue is clearly an emerging threat that could become a battlefield crisis in the future.**

## **Panelists and Issues Addressed**

Six panelists from the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, Human Rights Watch, The Brookings Institution, and the British Embassy, along with a former child soldier participated in the seminar.<sup>4</sup> Over 80 people from across the Marine Corps, other Services, Department of State, Office of the Secretary of Defense, The Joint Staff, US Special Operations Command, the British Army, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the media attended the seminar.

The morning panel addressed the overall issue of child soldiers, focusing on humanitarian and legal aspects. The speakers on the morning panel were: Ms. Kati Marton, Chief Advocate for Children in Armed Conflict, United Nations; Mr. Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier in Sierra Leone; Mr. Iain Levine, Chief of Humanitarian Policy Development and Advocacy, UNICEF Office of Emergency Programs; and Ms. Jo Becker, Director, Children's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch.

The afternoon panel focused on security aspects and potential ways for US military forces to deal with child soldiers when confronted by them on the battlefield and during peacekeeping operations. This panel featured Dr. Peter Singer, John M. Olin Post-Doctoral Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, The Brookings Institution and Major James Gray, Royal Marine Staff Officer on the British Naval Staff.

Each of the panelists provided important and interesting perspectives and insights. The first-hand accounts presented by each of the panelists, especially the former child soldier and the Royal Marine from the British Embassy, had a great impact on the audience. They highlighted their own experiences, described situations our Nation's military forces must be prepared to face, made recommendations on ways to effectively deal with child soldiers, and identified psychological issues that may affect them long after they have returned home.

---

<sup>3</sup> CETO was established in November 2000 at the direction of the Senate Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities out of a growing concern for the wide range of security challenges the US will face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its mission is to identify emerging threats, explore concepts, and determine capabilities and solutions to meet these future challenges in support to the Marine Corps Operational Commanders. CETO reports to the commander of the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory.

<sup>4</sup> See Attachment A for panelist biographies.

**Ms. Kati Marton, Chief Advocate for Children in Armed Conflict, United Nations.** Ms. Marton set the scene for the seminar by describing the how the first United States serviceman killed in Operation Enduring Freedom by hostile fire reportedly was killed by a 14-year-old Afghan boy. She went on to explain the magnitude and dynamics of the problem of child soldiers and posed several options for dealing with it.<sup>5</sup>

**Mr. Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier in Sierra Leone.** Mr. Beah shared his personal experiences and insights into what it was like to be a child soldier. He highlighted how children become soldiers and explained how they think, feel, and fight while they are soldiers, as well as the challenges they face during their rehabilitation and reintegration back into society.<sup>6</sup>

**Mr. Iain Levine, Chief of Humanitarian Policy Development and Advocacy, UNICEF Office of Emergency Programs.** Mr. Levine highlighted the challenges related to the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers back into society, and clarified international law prohibiting children under the age of 18 from fighting as soldiers and difficulties with its implementation.<sup>7</sup>

**Ms. Jo Becker, Advocacy Director, Children's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch.** Ms. Becker reviewed her recent research into child soldiers in Burma, as well as other Human Rights Watch investigations in Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She highlighted the global implications of the problem and the differences between the motivations and attitudes of child soldiers in various countries around the world.<sup>8</sup>

**Dr. Peter Singer, John M. Olin Post-Doctoral Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies, The Brookings Institution.** Dr. Singer discussed security-related aspects and provided an important perspective on the challenges US and Western forces will face if and when they encounter child soldiers in the future. He presented several innovative proposals concerning ways to deal with child soldiers that may save lives and reduce injuries and destruction. He also highlighted the need to develop doctrine and conduct training related to this issue.<sup>9</sup>

**Major Jim Gray, Royal Marine Staff Officer on the British Naval Staff.** Major Gray provided an invaluable perspective into the mindset of child soldiers as well as a description of the way they are organized and how they fight. He described the personal trauma he experienced upon his return home from serving with the United Nations in Sierra Leone. He attributed this trauma to having observed first-hand a society consumed by civil war in which violence had become routine and where child soldiers played an enormous military role.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> See Attachment B for Ms. Marton's prepared remarks.

<sup>6</sup> See Attachment C for a summary of Mr. Beah's presentation.

<sup>7</sup> See Attachment D for a summary of Mr. Levine's presentation.

<sup>8</sup> See Attachment E for Ms. Becker's prepared remarks.

<sup>9</sup> See Attachment F for Dr. Singer's briefing slides and Attachment G for his paper, "Caution: Children At War," *Parameters*, Winter 2001-2002.

<sup>10</sup> See Attachment H for a summary of Major Gray's presentation and Attachment I for his briefing slides.



## **Main Points from the Presentations and Discussion**

### ***Why Children Are Recruited***

Children are vulnerable and easy targets for recruitment, and are a quick, easy, low-cost way of generating forces. Groups that otherwise would have no real military power can pose a significant threat by augmenting their ranks with child soldiers.

According to Ms. Becker of Human Rights Watch, rebel groups and some national militaries offer incentives to soldiers for bringing in new recruits, such as promotions, money or even early discharges from service, exacerbating the forced recruitment of children.

In many cases, children are expendable and are used as decoys or cannon fodder so that the more seasoned fighting force can gain an added advantage.

Children's small size gives them certain advantages, for example, by allowing them to take cover more easily when laying an ambush.

Ms. Becker also explained that on the battlefield, children more readily follow orders and are less inhibited. They seemingly have no fear and acclimatize quickly to the battlefield. Furthermore, they often do not play by the rules and are more vicious than their grown-up counterparts.<sup>11</sup>

### ***How Children Are Recruited***

Children frequently are recruited forcibly from schools, churches, and refugee camps. Ms. Becker commented that in Burma, children often are told to either join the army or go to jail. Once forced into service, they are sent to recruitment centers and training camps. Regardless of their age, the training is the same regimen and is peppered with frequent beatings. Once the children complete rudimentary training, they are forced to fight.

Not all children, however, are recruited by force. There are some who join of their own volition, though not necessarily because they had much of a choice. They are usually below the age that is generally considered mature enough to make political decisions, and often are driven to join the army or rebel group out of desperation – they may lack food or shelter, may be orphans, or may be politically indoctrinated. Once they become soldiers, some do not want to go home because as soldiers, they are well fed, clothed, housed, and are “hooked” on the power of being a soldier and belonging to something. The former child soldier who spoke at the seminar, Mr. Beah, was one such

---

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed discussion of why children are recruited, see Ms. Becker's presentation at Attachment E.

recruit. He described “a circle of revenge” which was used to manipulate him into joining the army. He explained that after his family was killed, he ran for several days to avoid the fighting, ending up in a town controlled by the army. The soldiers provided him food, shelter, and protection. They explained how the rebels were committing murders and atrocities, and how the army was protecting the people. Over time, he saw more and more soldiers being killed by the rebels and felt compelled to join the army to help them out and survive.

As part of their training and conditioning, child soldiers are forced to kill much of what they know and love, from family and friends to teachers and students. Ms. Marton of the United Nations emphasized that they often are forced participate in attacks against their own villages after which they are told that they can never go home. Along the way, they lose their sense of self. They are kept “high” on drugs and alcohol, weakening their inhibitions and facilitating the entire indoctrination effort. They also are given amulets, which they are told will make them impervious to bullets.

### ***Facilitators For The Recruitment Of Child Soldiers***

**Failed States.** In countries with strong economies, democratic institutions, and tolerant societies, the army has an obligation to protect and serve the population and the government. However, several of the panelists commented that many of the countries and regions where children are soldiers have suffered years of social strife and civil war. Their governments have collapsed, their economies are ruined, they are unable to enforce law and order or provide basic services, and they are beset by poverty, disease, and broken families. There are no rules of engagement in these situations. Often, the army is the only entity that can provide the children, many of whom are orphans, even the barest necessities for everyday life, such as food and shelter, and some sort of organized structure.

**Advances In Technology.** Among the greatest enablers that facilitate the use of child soldiers are advances in modern technologies. Light arms are indeed light, making it possible for young children to carry them. Furthermore, they are relatively easy to handle and use, and are extremely powerful. There is no extensive or complicated training necessary to teach children how to fire an AK47. In some cases, children as young as eight years old have been seen dragging their weapons to the front.

**Small Arms Trade.** Mr. Levine of UNICEF pointed out that another major problem is the uncontrolled flow of arms into countries with ethnic tensions and civil war. The proliferation of inexpensive weapons on the black and open markets exacerbates social disparities and fuels discontent. This holds especially true in countries where the illegal mining of natural resources (diamonds, timber, etc.) allows combatants to sell those resources in exchange for money and arms. During the 1990s, for instance, Jonas Savimbi sold \$4 billion worth of diamonds on the international market in order to finance rebels from the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, or UNITA, fighting in the Angolan civil war. Ultimately, there was a huge public outcry against the diamond industry for its role in helping perpetuate the civil war. The World Diamond

Congress finally adopted a resolution, which, if fully implemented, stands to increase the diamond industry's ability to block conflict diamonds from reaching international markets.

### ***Implications On The Battlefield - A Terrible Dilemma***

**Increased Lethality.** According to The Brookings Institution's Dr. Singer, children on the battlefield add confusion and ultimately drive up the death toll. He made the point not to underestimate child soldiers. He explained that in many cases, they have years of combat experience and are more battle hardened than their older adversaries, having literally grown up fighting. Professional military forces are reluctant to fire upon children, which gives the children a greater advantage, especially if they are trained to shoot first and accurately. As evidenced by the British Royal Irish Regiment incident in Sierra Leone, adult, professional militaries initially tend to see child soldiers as they see children in their own culture – harmless and innocent. They feel sorry for the children, and this presents the adults with difficult choices. Mr. Beah described how children, being naturally small, can hide in places from which they can shoot and kill others, without easily being detected, giving them an early advantage.

**Laws Of War.** Mr. Beah explained that child soldiers do not respect the laws of war or follow any specific rules of engagement, emphasizing that children do not even know what these things are. Another point made by the panelists is that units that contain child soldiers carry out a much higher number of human rights violations on and off the battlefield, making conflicts much harder to resolve. Child soldiers normally do not take prisoners of war, and if they do, it is usually to kill them as a training or motivation example for new recruits. Also, their styles of fighting are different from soldiers who are trained conventionally, often placing themselves at a much greater risk than soldiers fighting against them would expect.

**Demoralizing Effects.** Battles that involve killing children often have a very demoralizing effect on professional combat forces from countries where children are protected and their rights are valued. Close to the end of the Second World War, when US forces were engaged in combat with units from the Hitler Youth, their morale was at its lowest when it should have been at its highest. If this level of loss of morale can occur in battles where right from wrong and dictatorship versus democracy is so clearly present, what level of demoralization can arise in units engaged in peace operations where good versus evil and right from wrong is much less clear? In Sri Lanka, for example, Indian troops fighting the insurgent group the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) experienced serious losses of morale because they frequently found themselves engaged in battles against children who populated the ranks of the LTTE.

### ***What Can Be Done – International Initiatives***

**United Nations.** Both Ms. Marton and Ms. Becker discussed the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* that would make it illegal to forcefully recruit children under the age of

18. Countries such as the US and the United Kingdom that allow recruits to sign up for military service at the age of 16 or 17 can still do so as long as there is parental consent and other measures are in place to assure that the signing up is voluntary. However, the Optional Protocol also states that children under the age of 18 cannot be sent into combat. Ms. Marton also discussed UN Resolution 1379, which is an effort to identify the most egregious people and parties in violation of the proposed international protocol. This document will be presented to the General Assembly in Fall 2002 and hopefully will pave the way for concrete action.<sup>12</sup>

**International Criminal Court.** Ms. Marton explained that the International Criminal Court (ICC), which was set up on July 1, 2002, would treat the forceful recruitment children under the age of 15 as a war crime. Since recruiting, training, and employing child soldiers under the age of 15 are considered crimes against humanity, child soldier demobilization must begin immediately even if the parties involved are still engaged in combat. A positive example, which may be a direct result of the creation of the ICC and other related efforts, is the South Sudanese Rebel Army, the SPLA. Although the SPLA is still fighting a civil war against the Government of Sudan, out of a wish to foster international goodwill, it has demobilized 4,500 child soldiers from its army.

**International Sanctions And Embargos.** Another option discussed during the seminar is for the international community to call for arms embargos and trade sanctions against countries or groups with child soldiers in their militaries. However, as seen on numerous occasions, it is difficult to enforce sanctions, especially over a long period of time. This holds especially true for countries where neighboring states are known to be actively supporting one or more of the groups engaged in combat.

### ***What Can Be Done – Local Initiatives***

**Gaining Rebel Army Cooperation.** Since rebel groups have not signed up to international law, they cannot be held legally accountable, as can governments. They also have no political accountability to worry about. Mr. Levine suggested that it might be more effective to work within the framework of traditional value systems and appeal to “a warrior’s sense of honor,” making the point that in no society or culture are young children traditionally sent into wars to fight. He added that in traditional societies, only men are warriors, not boys and women.

**Birth Records.** Mr. Levine also suggested that in order to enforce international standards and sanctions, there needs to be a means with which to prove violations of any internationally accepted norms. Many times in countries where children are recruited forcefully, there are only poor records, if any at all, recording children’s births. This makes it very hard for any international agency to prove that the children in the army are indeed underage. Thus, there needs to be a way to register children at birth so that there is official proof of their ages.

---

<sup>12</sup> See Attachment J for the *Optional Protocol on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict*. See Attachments B and E for comments from Ms. Marton and Ms. Becker.

## ***What Can Be Done – Military Initiatives***<sup>13</sup>

Military commanders must think strategically and consider non-traditional ways to best engage forces with child soldiers. These include:

**Elimination of Adult Leadership.** Eliminating the adult leadership of child soldier units can be an effective tool. However, in many cases the top leadership is not anywhere near the battlefield, and sometimes it is even out of the country. Nonetheless, dedicated counterinsurgency efforts should be used to target the adult leadership, whenever possible, even after successful encounters to ensure that the enemy does not regroup. The center of gravity is the hold leaders have over the children. The key is to break that link. If the adult leaders are captured or killed, the children often disappear.

**Fighting at a Distance and Firing for Shock.** Planners should consider the option of holding the child soldier threat at a distance and firing for shock, at least initially, to attempt to break up the child units, which often are not cohesive fighting forces. Demonstrative artillery fires and helicopter gunship passes and fires have been effective in Sierra Leone to help shock and break up child soldier forces. The unpredictability of child soldiers may be an asset at times for the armies employing them, but it may also be a vulnerability if exploited properly.

**Elimination of Recruitment Zones.** In order to prevent rebel groups from continuing to fight by swelling their ranks with child soldiers, every attempt should be made to secure the most likely locations where child soldiers are recruited. This includes schools, refugee camps, churches, demobilization sites, etc. These locations should be viewed as strategic locales in this type of a war; limiting access to these types of facilities may be an effective way of defeating the adversary indirectly.

**Non-Lethal Weapons.** US military commanders and policy-makers should explore options for using non-lethal weapons in situations that involve child soldiers. Non-lethal weapons may be more effective and humane for dealing with child soldiers than other, more traditional, lethal means. They also may help solidify political and public support for ongoing operations and long-term efforts. Much work already has been done in the area of non-lethal technologies both by the research and development community and the policy community. The issue of limiting child soldier casualties may lend itself well to arguments that recommend their expanded use.

**Public Affairs.** Public affairs implications of killing child soldiers, even in self-defense, can become a real problem. Dr. Singer suggested that it is best to sensitize the public ahead of time to the potential deaths of child soldiers. The public should be informed that everything possible is being done (use of non-lethal weapons, psychological operations, firing for shock effect, etc.) to avoid and limit child soldiers

---

<sup>13</sup> Many of the ideas and suggestions in this section were raised during Dr. Singer's presentation and discussed with the other panelists and the audience.

becoming casualties. At the same time, the public should be made aware that child soldiers, although they are children, are just as lethal behind an AK47 as adults, and often are more ruthless. Additionally, the public should be made aware that because child soldiers are such formidable adversaries, lethal force might be the only option available. Finally, every effort should be made to turn the blame onto those who recruited, abducted, trained, and forced the children to fight and sent them out to do their dirty work.

**Prisoners and Escapees.** US forces should welcome child soldier prisoners and escapees, as this could promote more desertions. Many times, children who are recruited forcefully look for ways out of their predicaments. This holds especially true for new recruits. If it becomes known that children who managed to escape were treated well and given a hope at a better future, it may lead to the attrition of child soldiers from the ranks of rebel and government forces alike.

**Intelligence.** Intelligence collection and assessments should consider fully the threats posed by child soldiers. Efforts should be made to understand everything possible about the child soldiers that US forces may face, such as how they were recruited and trained, how they are organized and how they fight, their amount of combat experience, and who the leaders are and where they are located. It is important for the planning of any future operations that involve child soldiers to understand the type of threats child soldiers can pose. For example, it may be necessary to protect against possible attacks from child soldiers posing as innocent children who are attempting to cross into controlled or secured areas while armed with grenades or other weapons hidden on them. Good intelligence on this issue can help protect US forces from an adversary that looks benign.

**Demobilization.** Both Dr. Singer and Mr. Levine recommended that US forces assist in demobilization and be very attuned to security aspects concerning this effort. It may be necessary to protect child soldiers, once demobilized, from the local population who may wish to seek revenge for the atrocities they suffered at the hands of the child soldiers. It also is important to protect demobilization centers from being overrun by rebel groups and armies seeking child soldier augmentees, who already are trained and experienced, to serve as soldiers within their ranks.

**Communicate Agreements.** Mr. Levine suggested that US forces take the message about signed agreements directly to the front lines. In many countries, even if the leaders of the country or military sign an agreement, the detailed information concerning the agreement and subsequent steps to be taken are not passed down the chain of command in a timely fashion; often what is passed down is very different from the actual agreement.

**Post-Conflict Treatment.** Major Gray, the British Royal Marine on the panel, explained that upon returning home from operations in which US forces encounter child soldiers, they may find it difficult to cope with normal life, and may go through a period of post-traumatic stress disorder. Many will be deeply affected by what they saw.

Leaders must prepare the forces for the kind of environment they will face before they deploy on operations. They also must go through the process of discussing and understanding what they were exposed to upon redeployment. Similar efforts will be needed with the family members of returning service members.

### **More Challenges**

**Reintegration.** Mr. Levine described how difficult it is to reintegrate child soldiers into society because of all the violence they have been exposed to and the fact that many children only know how to kill. He stressed that there is a bigger likelihood of success in rehabilitation if the child can be rescued before he or she has been a soldier for more than a year. After a year or more of fighting as a soldier, it becomes much more difficult to reintegrate them back into society. Obviously, cases vary according to the individual child. After disarmament, there is no set time frame in which children recover, but the psychosocial demobilization process usually takes many months. Some children recover within as few as eight months, but most take much longer. Mr. Levine made the point that it is important not to put a specific timeframe on this process, emphasizing that it only takes a few weeks to turn a child into a soldier, but many months to turn him or her back into a child. He also stated that it is important to work with the families in addition to the children. During the psychosocial demobilization, the entire moral universe of the child has to be reversed 180 degrees; this is a huge undertaking.

**HIV/AIDS.** Many of the conflict countries with child soldiers are afflicted by high HIV/AIDS rates. The atrocities of war, breakdown of civil society, displacement, family separation, rape, and other sexual violence have helped spread HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Girls who are abducted or “recruited” often succumb to these diseases through multiple partners and bear children who also are infected, further perpetuating the global AIDS epidemic. Those who are infected also may have a “nothing-to-lose” attitude that encourages them to commit violent acts.

### **Recommendations on Future Efforts**

**Doctrine.** Doctrine should describe the Child Soldier Phenomenon as it exists around the world and highlight the probability that Marines will encounter child soldiers during future operations. More importantly, it should address ways to deal with child soldiers, such as those listed above.

**Training.** The topic of child soldiers should be included in training for officers and non-commissioned officers, especially those in the training base, but also during professional development training. This training should familiarize Marines with the issue as it exists; examine countries, regions, and conflicts where Marines may encounter child soldiers; identify tactics, techniques, and procedures that will best help them deal with child soldiers; inform Marines of relevant international law, including obligations under the Geneva Conventions; and prepare them for the dilemmas they will face both on the battlefield and afterwards.

For units that are in training and preparing to deploy to a specific country or region where they may encounter child soldiers, exercise scenarios should include situations involving child soldiers to ensure Marines are aware of the issue prior to deployment. These units also should receive Cultural Intelligence Seminars on this issue with experts such as those who participated in this seminar. Additionally, they should be given points of contact for UNICEF or NGO-run demobilization and/or rehabilitation programs within these countries. This will facilitate coordination with these organizations and development of procedures to follow in instances where child soldiers are apprehended, to insure that they are promptly delivered to appropriate rehabilitation programs.

Child soldier related issues should be inserted into wargame scenarios to help leaders and decision-makers determine how best to respond to the challenges child soldiers will pose to Marines.

Finally, in situations where the Marine Corps is involved in conducting foreign military training for other nations, the issue of child soldiers should be included in such training, including for example, relevant international law and the importance of proper recruitment procedures and verifying proof of age to ensure that children are not enlisted.

## **Acknowledgements**

*CETO would like to thank all six of the panelists for taking the time from their schedules to participate in the seminar. Not only did they inform and educate the audience about the Child Soldier Phenomenon, but they shared their personal experiences and professional insights which greatly helped the audience comprehend and understand the overall dynamics and challenges of the problem, particularly as it impacts the US military.*

*CETO would like to thank Dr. Peter Singer for researching, writing, and speaking about the issue; it was his interview on National Public Radio in April 2002 that first brought the Child Soldier Phenomenon to the forefront as an emerging threat and opportunity for the Marine Corps to consider. Ms. Kati Marton was particularly helpful in providing the motivation and support from her United Nations office to conduct the seminar and in helping to find other panelists. Mr. Iain Levine from UNICEF and Ms. Jo Becker from Human Rights Watch provided well-rounded, comprehensive analyses of the problem based on their years of dedicated work in countries around the world affected by the Child Soldier Phenomenon. Finally, CETO would like to thank both Mr. Ishmael Beah and Major Jim Gray for their candor and courage in sharing their very moving and critically important personal experiences about what they lived and saw first-hand.*



**Kati Marton**  
**Chief Advocate**  
**Office of Special Representative of the Secretary General**  
**For Children and Armed Conflict**

Author and journalist Kati Marton was born in Hungary and has spent two decades writing and reporting from the United States, Europe and the Far East. Kati Marton is a director and former chairman of the board of the Committee to Protect Journalists and a member of the Freedom Forum's Media Studies Center Advisory Committee. She also serves on the board of directors of the International Rescue Committee, the Human Rights Watch, the New America Foundation, the Central European University, and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Ms. Marton's book, *Hidden Power – Presidential Marriages that Shaped History*, was published in September 2001.

Since 1980, Ms. Marton has published four books and contributed as a reporter to numerous news organizations, including ABC News, Public Broadcasting Services, National Public Radio, *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Times of London*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, *Vanity Fair* and *The New Republic*. Her first book, *Wallenberg*, a biography of Raoul Wallenberg, was published by Random House in 1982. From 1983 until 1984, she was a columnist for the *Sunday Times of London*. Her second book, a novel entitled *American Women* was published in 1987. Her investigative history, *The Polk Conspiracy – Murder and Cover-up in the Case of CBS News Correspondent George Polk*, has been acquired by Mel Gibson for a feature film. Her fourth book, *A Death in Jerusalem – the Assassination by Extremists of the First Middle East Peacemaker*, was published by Pantheon Books/Random House in the fall of 1994. From 1995 until 1997, Ms. Marton hosted *America and the World*, a weekly half-hour broadcast on international affairs from National Public Radio, produced by the Council on Foreign Relations.

From December 1977 until December 1979, Ms. Marton was Bonn Bureau Chief and Foreign Correspondent for ABC News. While based in West Germany, MS Marton reported from many countries, including Poland, Hungary, Italy, Holland, Northern Ireland, East Germany, and the Middle East. Ms. Marton was a news writer/reporter at WCAU-TV, the CBS-owned-and-operated affiliate in Philadelphia from January 1973 until November 1977. At WCAU, Ms. Marton covered City Hall, the courts, and labor-related stories, and anchored newscasts, documentaries and talk shows. From March 1971 until October 1972, Ms. Marton was a reporter for National Public Radio in Washington. In addition to diplomatic and political assignments, Ms Marton was involved in the development of NPR's program, *All Things Considered*.

*Kati Marton has received several prestigious honors for her reporting, including a Gannett Fellowship in 1988 and a George Foster Peabody Award for a one-hour documentary on China. She was a Freedom Forum Media Studies Center Visiting Scholar at Columbia University from 1992 until 1993. She also received a Philadelphia Press Association Award for Best Television Feature Story and a Channel 12 (PBS) Award for reporting. In 1997, she was awarded the Marc H. Tannenbaum Foundation for*

*the Advancement of Interreligious Understanding Media Bridge Award and the Athens, Greece-based Kyriazis Foundation award for the promotion of press freedom. Most recently, she was awarded the Rebekah Kohut Humanitarian Award by the National Council of Jewish Women, in 2001.*

Ms. Marton attended Wells College in Aurora, New York, the Sorbonne, and the Institute des Etudes de Science Politiques in Paris. Ms. Marton was awarded a B.A. in Romance Languages and a M.A. in International Relations by the George Washington University in 1971.

Kati Marton is married to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and lives in New York City with her children Elizabeth and Christopher.

## **Ishmael Beah Child Soldier**

Most of us go through difficult stages in our lives. Some of these difficult stages transform and enlighten our view of life. The devastating effect of family problems and the civil war in my country helped me appreciate my existence and the existence of others in a positive way.

I was born in Sierra Leone West Africa, in 1980. During my early childhood years, my country was peaceful and I lived a satisfying life that was full of love, friendliness and happiness. Between the ages of nine and eleven, everything changed. My father and mother separated and a civil began.

When I was thirteen, the civil war that had already been going on for several years in my country, came to my town and interrupted my life. During that period of chaos, I lost my family and wandered alone. I had no inclination where I was heading, but the determination to find safety. After months of traveling, sleeping in the bush, and having to eat and drink only what the forest provided, I arrived at a village that was occupied by Sierra Leone Military Forces.

Since I was in pursuit of food and protection, I felt that it was safe to be with the military who provided me food and a place to sleep. As a result of what I thought was generosity, my interaction with the soldiers grew daily. The misery that almost cost me my life awaited just around the corner.

After months of staying with the soldiers, rebels started attacking the village. The soldiers fought back day after day. They lost most of their men in battle. As a result of fewer soldiers, the rebels came closer and surrounded the village.

The Military was in need of people to increase their number. All the boys in the village were asked to join the army. There was no way out. If I left the village I would get killed by the rebels who would think I was a spy. On the other hand, if I stayed in the village and refused to join the army, I wouldn't be given food and would eventually be thrown out, which was as good as being dead. I was briefly trained in warfare and unwillingly became a child soldier.

I can never forget being in the battlefield for the first. At first, I couldn't pull the trigger. I was lying almost numb in ambush watching kids my age being shot at and killed. That sight of blood and crying of people in pain triggered something inside me that I didn't understand, but it made me pass the point of compassion for others. I lost my sense of self.

After crossing that line, I was not a normal kid. I was a traumatized kid. I became completely unaware of the dangerous and crooked road that my life took. In fact, most of the horrible events that I went through didn't affect me until after I was taken out of the army and put in a psycho social therapy home years later.

At the psychosocial therapy home, I began to experience my trauma. I had sleepless nights. Every night I recalled the last day that my childhood was stripped away from me. I felt I had no reason for staying alive since I was the only one left in my family. I had no peace. My soul felt corrupted and I was lost in my own thoughts blaming myself for what happened to me. The only times that I found peace with myself was when I began writing songs about the good times before the war. Through these writings, as well as the help of the staff in my psychosocial therapy home, I was able to successfully overcome my trauma. I once again found my childhood that was almost lost. I realized that I had a great determination to survive. Also my songs gave me hope. Fifty percent of the kids didn't overcome their trauma.

Fortunately, I was reunited with my uncle and started school again in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. At this point in my life, I grew a sense of appreciation for everything around me and became only interested in the positive outcome of every situation. I came to the conclusion that I survived the war for a reason. That reason was to fight for peace so that the tragedy that befell me would not continue to affect the lives of other children in my country and around the world.

In 1996, I was chosen to represent the youth of my country at a "Young Voices" conference at the United Nation. I went back home after the conference and started working with the youth of my country. First I tried to enlighten them about their rights, then, urged the government to make sure that the youth would have a voice in the decisions made for them. But the campaign didn't last long because the civil war escalated to the city. All educational, governmental and productive institutions were brought to a halt. It became very dangerous for anti war people to live in the country. With the help of Laura Simms, a facilitator that I met at the Young Voices conference, I was able to leave my country. She brought me to the US so that I would have a better education. I am currently living with her as my new mother in New York.

One of the lessons that I learned from the tragic events of my life, summed up in a parable of my country is that "once there is life, there is hope for a better future." I think that every human being should be aware of the possibility of change. I strongly believe all humans are positive beings and are capable of thinking positively. It is just that life brings us different roads to travel, in order to find sanity in ourselves. It is possible for everyone to arrive at this hopeful conclusion.

If we think of the future positively, our actions towards that future will be positive. Everyone can make a difference. You don't have to be rich or famous to do so. If one person can change the way they interact with other people, no matter who they are or where they are from, that makes a big difference. It seems to me, one of the problems of our last century was the inability to get along with each other.

Back home my elders said, "Sometimes good comes from bad." It is true. It is also true that good comes from good.

**Iain Levine**  
**Chief of Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy**  
**Office of Emergency Programmes**  
**United Nations Children's Fund**

Iain Levine has worked on humanitarian and human rights issues for nearly 20 years for non-governmental organizations and the United Nations. He spent over ten years in Africa working in a variety of health and humanitarian programmes with Save the Children UK and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), particularly in Mozambique and Sudan north and south. His particular interest in the protection of children's rights led him to Amnesty International where he served as United Nations Representative from 1997-2000. He has been Chief of Humanitarian Policy and Advocacy in the Office of Emergency Programmes of UNICEF since June 2000.

**Jo Becker**  
**Children's Rights Advocacy Director for**  
**Human Rights Watch**

Jo Becker is the Children's Rights Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch, an independent organization that conducts regular, systematic investigations of human rights abuses in some seventy countries around the world. Ms. Becker represents Human Rights Watch before the press, government officials, and the general public, and works with other non-governmental and international organizations to stop abuses against children, including the use of children as soldiers, hazardous child labor, and ill treatment during detention.

Ms. Becker was the founding chairperson of the international Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and serves on the steering committee of the U.S. Campaign to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. She has testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the issue of child soldiers and recently returned from a three-week investigative mission along the Thai-Burma border to document child recruitment in Burma.

Her writing has appeared in the Washington Post, New York Times, International Herald Tribune, Christian Science Monitor, Miami Herald and numerous magazines. She is also author of Human Rights Watch reports on the detention of unaccompanied minors by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service and worldwide violence against children.

Prior to joining the staff of Human Rights Watch, Ms. Becker was the executive director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a national interfaith peace and justice organization.

Ms. Becker has an International Baccalaureate from the Lester B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific, a BA from Goshen College (IN), and a Master's degree in Political Science from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

**Peter W. Singer**  
**John M. Olin Post-Doctoral Fellow**  
**Foreign Policy Studies**

**Expertise**

Foreign policy, national security

**Current Projects**

The privatized military industry

**Education**

Ph.D., Harvard University, 2001; A.B., Princeton University 1997

**Background**

Previous Positions: Doctoral Fellow, Harvard University; Action Officer, Balkans Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense; Special Assistant, International Peace Academy; Instructor, Teaching Assistant, Duke University Talent Identification Program

**Publications**

**Articles:**

“A New Model Afghan Army,” with Anja Manuel, *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2002)

“AIDS and International Security,” *Survival* (Spring 2002)

“Pakistan’s Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education not Jihad,” *Brookings Analysis Paper* (November 2001)

“Winning the War of Words: Information Operations in Afghanistan,” *Brookings Analysis Paper* (October 2001)

“Corporate Warriors: The Rise and Ramifications of the Privatized Military Industry,” *International Security* (Winter 2001-2002)

“Caution: Children at War,” *Parameters* (Winter 2001)

“National Missile Defense: What Should the United States Do Now?” *Harvard International Affairs Colloquium Paper* (May 2001)

“Bosnia 2000: Phoenix or Flames?” *World Policy Journal* (Spring 2000)

“The Thucydides Tapes,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* (September 1999)

“America and the Greek Revolution,” *Parallos* (Summer 1996)

## **Major Jim Gray**

### **Royal Marines**

Major Jim Gray is the Royal Marine Staff Officer on the British Naval Staff. He is responsible to the Naval Attaché and the Marine Attaché for the conduct and administration of all Royal Marine matters in the United States. He is the primary desk officer in liaison with HQ USMC and the USMC in general. He is responsible for the administration of the RM PEPS and US based RM Officers and SNCOs. He assists in the planning and preparation of exercises involving the Royal Marines on behalf of HQRM.

Major Gray joined the Royal Marines in April 1992 as a direct entry. On completion of Royal Marine Officer Training at Lympstone he subsequently served as a Troop Commander with Comacchio Group protecting Britain's nuclear assets in Scotland. He was then selected to study for a Batchelor of Arts Degree with the Royal Navy. He is a trained and experienced Intelligence Officer who has been employed in a variety of G1, G2, G3 and Peace Support appointments. He is trained in Jungle and Desert Warfare and is a qualified Diving Supervisor. He is a Graduate in Maritime Defence, Strategic Studies and Military Technology. During early 1999 he deployed to Sierra Leone in West Africa with the UN. What followed was a series of life changing encounters and experiences in one of the most savage and brutal parts of the world.

#### **Appointments:**

Apr 92-Jul 93	Young Officer Training Lympstone
Jul 93-Dec 93	Troop Commander Comacchio Group (Scotland & Cyprus)
Jan 94-Jun 94	'in-service' Ba (Hons) Degree BRNC Dartmouth A1/A2
Jul 94-Jul 95	'in-service' Ba (Hons) Degree RNEC Manadon
Jul 95-Jun 96	'in-service' Ba (Hons) Degree RNC Greenwich
Jun 96-Nov 96	Recruit Troop Commander CTCRM Lympstone
Nov 96-Dec 96	Brigade & Regimental Intelligence Officers Course
Dec 96-Jan 99	Intelligence Officer 40 Commando Royal Marines (Far East, South Africa, Middle East & R1/R2 Ops with JRDF)
Jan 99-Jul 99	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (as UN Observer & Mil Spokesman)
Oct 99-Apr 00	Junior Command & Staff College
Apr 00-Jun 01	SO3 Visits & Protocol Officer CTCRM Lympstone
Jul 01-	RM Staff Officer, British Defence Staff Washington DC

#### **Interests:**

Major Gray, and his wife Sam, live in McLean Virginia. He is a keen technical diver and has been fortunate enough to have dived extensively around the world. An avid sports fan, he participates in and follows a range of sporting interests particularly football (soccer!). During his free time he enjoys fly-fishing and is an enthusiastic amateur chef.



**Child-Soldier-Seminar 06/11/2002**  
**Remarks by Kati Marton**

I want to begin by relating an anecdote. I suspect many of you will be familiar with this story, so I will be brief. The story takes place January 4 of this year; the place is a rugged, mountainous region just outside Khost, Afghanistan, near the border with Pakistan. And the protagonist is Sergeant Nathan Ross Chapman of the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Group. The 31-year-old Green Beret, who parachuted into Panama twelve years earlier and served in the Gulf War and in Haiti, "had a huge and soft heart," according to one buddy, as well as a fierce warrior spirit.

At about 1600, after leaving a meeting with Afghani tribal leaders, Chapman stood in the back of a pickup truck and surveyed the damage from a recent allied bombing run. Out of nowhere, small arms fire rained down on him and his companions. Chapman was shot in the legs, severing a major artery. He became the first American soldier to die from hostile fire in Operation Enduring Freedom.

Here is the part of the story that you may not be familiar with. Sergeant Chapman was killed by a 14-year-old boy.

It looks unlikely that Chapman saw his attacker before the ambush. Had he done so, this father of two who loved children would have faced the terrible realization that the only way to defend himself was to shoot a child.

It is a realization and a reality that American soldiers—and soldiers all over the world—are facing with increasing frequency. The average American serviceman was 26 years of age during World War II. While the average age dipped to just 19 during the bloodiest days of the Vietnam War—today the average U.S. soldier is, once again, 26. This is a sign of a strong military and a healthy society.

For much of the world, however, the picture is much bleaker. In America's latest conflict, both the Northern Alliance and their enemies drew heavily from the youngest Afghans. "Children are innocent," one Taliban fighter said, "so they are the best tools against dark forces." In October 1993, children as young as 14 shot at the Rangers in Mogadishu.

Already this year, Palestinian girls as young as eighteen and boys as young as sixteen have been used as suicide bombers in Israel. In Paraguay, the average recruit is just over sixteen years old. Seven percent of Angolan children have fired a gun at someone and seventy percent have seen someone murdered.

During the conflict in Sierra Leone, (a metaphor for the worst abuses committed against and by children in recent times,) Civil Defense Forces recruited soldiers as young as eight years of age. The plight of Sierra Leone's children is extreme—but not altogether atypical. Kids on every continent are being taught to use AK-47s, which are light enough and simple enough to be carried and maintained by eight-year-olds. They are forced to mutilate and murder their friends and relatives to prove their loyalty to their new "parent" figures—often young adults or older children in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

Afghani children have known nothing but war. A study by UNICEF found that nearly half of all children in Kabul had lost a parent to violence; nearly three quarters had lost a family member. Nearly two-thirds lost their homes. The child soldiers who survived the latest war—hundreds on both sides did not—now face the same challenges as the demobilized Congolese and Sierra Leoneans. "We have young boys," said one Northern Alliance commander, "that are more familiar with a gun than with school." UNICEF, UNHCR—the UN refugee agency, and others are working to reunite families and reintegrate child combatants.

So what are our options in dealing with this problem, which, like the spread of HIV or Terrorism, respects no borders:

Early engagement with states in crisis is essential. We must compel countries and armed groups to adhere to the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by withholding diplomatic, financial and military assistance from those that resist. The newly-minted International Criminal Court makes it a

War Crime to recruit children less than 15 years of age for use in hostilities. The ICC—which becomes a functioning body on July 1—and its child soldier mandate, must be backed by the indictment and prosecution of those we know are practicing this form of child abuse.

Last November, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1379, asking the Secretary-General to "name names" and provide a list of parties to conflict that are in violation of their international obligations with respect to the protection of children. This list will serve as a benchmark for member states, so that they can bring all of the political, diplomatic, legal and economic pressure they have to bear on groups that use and abuse children.

So we have the tools, now all that we need is the courage to use them.

It is in our own best interest that we not allow entire regions to implode. The way we did Afghanistan. Unilateralism has no place in the post 9/11 world beset by so many problems that respect no borders.

We must work hard to rehabilitate post-conflict societies. 13-year-old Maroof Ahmad Awan was sent to fight in Afghanistan as part of his "schooling" at a Pakistani madrasa called Jamia Islamia. Some say close the madrasa. I say if you close the madrasa, then you need to replace it with a real school. Maroof's father did not send his son to the madrasa because he wanted his son to be a soldier and kill Americans; he sent his son to Jamia Islamia because there were no other schools available.

The problem of child soldiers is such a big and costly one that the only solution is for it to be stopped cold. For Sergeant Chapman, for the thousands killed by children and the thousands of children killed, we must not fail.

Thanks, Semper Fi, etc . . .

These new "parents" will often give their kids drugs or amulets that, the children are told, will make them impervious to bullets. These children are thus among the world's most fearless and brutal fighters. BUT THEY ARE FIRST OF ALL VICTIMS OF A TERRIBLE FORM OF CHILD ABUSE.

When conflicts end—as in Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Cambodia—child soldiers continue to be dangerous because, unlike conventional demobilized combatants who can return to their plowshares, these children are neither educated nor trained in non-violent pursuits. Furthermore, they have a sort of reverse socialization: all they know is how to kill or be killed. Combine this with the fact that they are asked to reenter societies already imploding, and it is clear that it is not enough just "to end a war." The international community needs to make a tremendous commitment in order to turn these kids into productive people. The alternative is world made less and less stable by a generation weaned on brutality. IN A WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS, THESE FACTS HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES

FOR ALL OF US....

As many as one half million children serve as combatants in the 30+ conflicts around the globe. Twice that number have been orphaned or separated from their parents. Two million children have been killed—and more than twice that many disabled—in armed conflicts in the last decade. 12 million have been left homeless and psychologically traumatized by conflicts that have been forced upon them.

Here is the status quo in some of the worst cases.

Sierra Leone, once considered an intractable symbol for "hopeless Africa," is of late something of a success story in its progress towards disarming its child soldiers. In an otherwise broken country, DDRR—Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation—appears to be working: Between May 2001 and January 2002 about 7,000 child soldiers have been disarmed. The children's weapons have been turned in and burned in ceremonies held in Lungi, Bo, Makeni, and Kenema. "Reintegration" is, of course, much more complex, costly and time consuming. But most child-excombatants have been absorbed in various short-term reintegration projects. Their own families are often afraid of these children, but the scenes where the former 11-year-old "sergeant" is hugged by his weeping father and suddenly becomes a kid again, make it worth whatever it takes.

Needless to say, there is never enough money for any of this, in contrast to the abundant flow of arms—especially small arms, which are the child soldiers' enablers. AK-47s are easy to come by—they cost as little as \$6 a piece in some parts of Africa; but acceptance of a child who has shot his friends is much more difficult to attain.

Sudan: Childhood is a commodity almost as scarce—but not as valued—as water in much of the Sudan. Over 4,000 child soldiers have been disarmed so far. But since April, in the Western Upper Nile, an estimated 400 children have been involved in an upsurge in fighting (including helicopter attacks on civilians) over the oil fields in the Nyhal area.

The attempts of UN and NGO partners to demobilize children in camps run by rebel groups has not been successful, because of continued fighting.

Under Joseph Kony's savage but mesmerizing control, the abducted children who form the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda and southern Sudan have been among the most brutalized and violent child soldiers. The terrible dilemma of how do you rescue children who are trained and programmed to shoot back has never been clearer than in southern Sudan.

DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo): At present, about 15,000 child soldiers are fighting in the government armies, local militias, and other armed groups. Former president Laurent Kabila employed Congolese child soldiers—known as "kados," or "little ones" —as runners, bodyguards, porters and spies. Many fought at the front with virtually no training. Kabila used 30,000 of them in his 1996-97 war against Mobutu Sese Seko. Some were among his Presidential Guard. He gave them tattoos, which he told them would make them invincible.

The government of his son and successor, Joseph Kabila, started demobilizing seven months ago, in December of 2001. The children have been in camps during this period, some of them getting psychological help while the UN and NGOs look for their families.

Elsewhere in the Congo, the situation is less rosy...

The Rwandan-backed rebel forces have not only recruited children into the fighting forces, but have also pressed kids into use as decoys. This is a very tricky and horrifying strategy: unarmed children will be made to bang on trees with sticks; government troops, thinking that they are under attack, will shoot the children, and the older, armed rebels will fire upon the government troops from a different location. Needless to say, the children are slaughtered wholesale.

**BUT: LET, ME EMPHASIZE THIS, CHILD SOLDIERS ARE NOT A UNIQUELY AFRICAN PROBLEM:**

Cambodia has been Asia's worst-case scenario for child soldiers. Primarily the Khmer Rouge, but also the government, recruited and killed thousands of children in the bloody, at times genocidal, 25+ year conflict.

The government took a step in the right direction two years ago, however, when it became the first Asian state to sign the Optional Protocol prohibiting the use of soldiers under 18. The Khmer Rouge has largely disintegrated (a process hastened by the death of its former leader, Pol Pot), and UNICEF and NGOs are working with the Cambodian government towards full demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers.

Afghanistan: The world rightly celebrated the defeat of the Taliban, the hunting down of Al Qaeda fighters, and, for the first time in 5 years, the return of girls to school. However, the damage caused by decades of war to Afghanistan's infrastructure and to the psyches of its children, is not so easily rectified.

### **Mr. Ishmael Beah Comments**

Child soldiers are physically small and can hide, shoot and kill people without being seen.

Child soldiers are encouraged to drink alcohol and take drugs. They are kept high all the time so they do not think about what they are doing.

Child soldiers are so traumatized by everything they have been through, that nothing will stop them from shooting and killing. All of the horrible things they have been through, the killing, maiming, raping, and destroying become “normal” to them.

During a civil war, child soldiers use all of the dirty tricks imaginable.

The international community needs to create rehabilitation centers for children, and needs to advertise them to encourage children to leave their military units and go to the centers.

### **Mr. Iain Levine Comments**

Uncontrolled flow of arms into countries exacerbates social disparities and fuels discontent.

Although most conflicts involving children are internal, oftentimes they involve outside intervention as well as recruitment and training of child soldiers across borders.

Often, children are forced to commit atrocities. Once they kill people in their own villages, they become brutalized and cannot return home.

Agreements and Treaties. Governments sign treaties, rebel groups do not. Even when governments sign treaties, because of command and control problems, it is difficult to communicate their contents throughout the country. It is even more difficult to implement them. Oftentimes, agreements even with very senior people are extremely weak and it is extremely difficult to get them carried out at all. In order to obtain government and rebel group cooperation on the issue of child soldiers, it may be worthwhile to speak with them about traditional values and the basic code of who fights and who does not fight. In most traditional societies, only men are sent to be warriors. The international community should try to appeal to the leaders' sense of honor to open the door to dialog. When agreements are made, it may help to take them directly to the people on the front lines.

Recruitment of Child Soldiers. Recruitment of child soldiers is not something governments and warring parties want to advertise. Western countries have voluntary recruitment in their militaries. But the term "voluntary recruitment" does not mean the same thing in all countries. Oftentimes children are abducted and in other ways forced to become soldiers. Girls also are child soldiers. In addition to fighting, they serve as messengers, coolies, spies, and sex slaves.

Demobilization Process. When children are returned to their villages, healing ceremonies play very important roles. On one hand, these ceremonies allay fears within the communities by demonstrating that the children have been rehabilitated and are neither violent nor are they soldiers any more. On the other hand, healing ceremonies tell the children that the community forgives them for what they have done and is accepting them back. Traditionally demobilization occurs at the end of a conflict. Because making children fight as soldiers is a violation of their human rights, international law requires that they be demobilized immediately regardless of the status of the conflict.

AIDS. Many of the countries that are facing the problem of child soldiers, especially in West and Central Africa, also are facing the AIDS epidemic. Conflicts promote family separation and sexual violence, which increases the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Those affected by AIDS also may have a nothing-to-lose attitude that encourages them to commit violent acts.

**CHILD SOLDIERS:  
PERSPECTIVES FROM HUMAN RIGHTS FIELD INVESTIGATIONS**

**Jo Becker**

**Children's Rights Advocacy Director, Human Rights Watch  
Presentation to the Center on Emerging Threats and Opportunities  
Seminar on Child Soldiers  
June 11, 2002  
Quantico Marine Base**

Human Rights Watch investigates and documents human rights abuses in about seventy countries around the world. Since 1994, we have sent teams of researchers to conflict areas to conduct interviews with current and former child soldiers to document their experiences. In the last eight years, we have directly documented the use of child soldiers in Angola, Burma, Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Uganda.

This morning, to give you a better understanding of how these children are recruited, and their experiences, I'll focus on our findings in three countries: Burma, Colombia and the Great Lakes region of Africa.

**BURMA:**

It's a common misconception that child soldiers are an African phenomenon primarily linked to opposition or rebel groups. In fact, a significant number of child soldiers worldwide are part of government armies and the largest single user of child soldiers in the world is Burma (or Myanmar). The Burmese Army includes as many as 70,000 children under 18 and accounts for nearly one of every four child soldiers worldwide.

In March, I spent three weeks along the Thai-Burma border, interviewing dozens of former child soldiers from the Burmese Army. We found that forced recruitment is the norm. Only one of the kids we interviewed had volunteered. The rest were apprehended on the street, at festivals, at train stations and on their way to school. Commonly, soldiers would approach the children and ask, "Do you want to join the army?" When the child said "No," or "I'm too young," the soldiers would respond, "You can join the army or you can go to jail." If a child continued to refuse, they may be detained and beaten until they agree.

We estimate that approximately 40% of new recruits into the Burmese army are under age eighteen. 10-15% are under the age of 15. One boy we interviewed was recruited at age 11 and another was picked up at age 10.

The children are sent to recruitment centers, and then to training camps where they spend 4 months. All recruits, regardless of whether they're 12 or 20, receive the same training, including weapons training with AK-47s, M-16s, G3 and G4s. For smaller children, the training can be very difficult. One boy told us that his gun was as tall as he was, and

many said that their guns were very hard to carry. But if they dropped their gun or made a mistake, they would often be beaten. These beatings happened every day and were so numerous that many children lost count.

The children often have no contact with their families, and in many cases, their families didn't know what happened to them. Not surprisingly, children are often miserable and desperately homesick. Many try to run away, but if they're caught, they are brought back to the camp and forced to lie facedown on the ground. They are then beaten by each of the other trainees in their group – usually about 250. Many must be hospitalized afterwards, and died as a result.

After training, children are sent to join battalions and often stationed in combat areas where they must fight ethnic opposition groups. Again, age makes no difference in whether or not a child is sent into combat, and we interviewed kids that were only 12 when they first went into battle.

Initially, many described being scared in battle. Some said they were too afraid to fire their guns, or would find a hiding place and then fire their gun wildly in the air. (Interestingly, one of the opposition leaders talked about this and commented that child soldiers were a quote “waste of ammunition.”) But they acclimatized to battle very quickly. Even by their second battle, many said they were no longer afraid and would aim at the enemy. Most had no understanding of what the conflict was about, but quickly adopted an attitude of “They’re shooting at me, so I’ll shoot back.”

In Burma, abuses by government forces against civilians are common. One boy we interviewed described a massacre by his unit of fifteen women and children, including three babies. He was just thirteen at the time. He showed little remorse, which I think illustrates how damaging war is to the psyche of children forced to participate at such young ages.

In Burma, when we interviewed child soldiers, we ended each interview by asking them, “What age do you think someone should be before they become a soldier?” Some of the children that we were interviewing were 16 and still actively fighting. But surprisingly, each one, without exception, responded by saying 18 or even older. When we asked “why?”, they said things like, “before 18, the life of the soldier is too hard.” Or “before age 18, you don’t understand what it means to become a soldier.”

## **COLOMBIA:**

Before December 1999, child soldiers were active in every part of Colombia’s armed conflict – as part of the national armed forces, the government-linked paramilitaries, and the guerrilla. Their numbers probably exceeded 25,000. 16,000 of these were part of Colombia’s national armed forces. However, in part as a result of heightened international awareness about the child soldier’s issue, in 1999 the government raised its recruitment age to 18 and began demobilizing children in its ranks.



Children still make up a significant portion of guerrilla forces and paramilitaries, however, and there are probably 6,000-10,000 children currently fighting. The guerrillas refer to child soldiers as “little bees” for the ability and power to sting. The paramilitaries call them “little bells” because they are deployed in front to draw fire, detect traps and serve as an early warning system. In the cities, child members of militaries are called “little carts” because they ferry drugs and weapons without raising suspicion.

Children around the world join armed groups for many reasons. We’ve found that many of these are at play in Colombia:

- Some are enticed by recruiters who come to school and offer stories of excitement and adventure;
- Some join because they are promised a wage or their family is offered guarantees of security;
- Some join because they want to defend their families from attack;
- Some runaways join because of family violence or losses;
- Some girls join because they fall in love with guerilla boys;
- Some are virtually born into the guerrilla because their parents are members;
- Some are forcibly recruited. Paramilitaries force families to provide children for service or risk being killed as suspected guerilla sympathizers. Last year, a group of paramilitaries seized a youth detention center and abducted ten children.

Paramilitaries use children as young as eight to patrol with units, for spying, and as backup troops. The guerrilla use children to collect intelligence make and deploy mines, serve as advance troops in ambush attacks, and to kidnap and guard hostages. These children are often fully armed. One 13-year old girl reported that she had used pistols, AK-47s, Galils, M-16s, R-15s, Uzis, Ingrams, and a 357 Magnum.

One difference between Colombia and Burma is that while in Burma, recruitment is exclusively of boys, in Colombia, girls are a significant percentage – as high as 30% - of both guerilla and paramilitary forces. Girls are frequently subjected to sexual abuse, often by middle-ranking officers. We have also received reports that the FARC fit young girls with IUDs or give them contraceptive injections.

In many conflicts involving children, we’ve seen the involvement of drugs as a way of reducing a child’s inhibitions to fight. This is also the case in Colombia, where some children have reported drinking milk mixed with gunpowder. One boy in the guerilla said, “Gunpowder gives you more energy, like with the desire to kill the troops passing in front of you. You say to yourself, “I hope they come my way, and then you load up and shoot off a round and feel more capable, with better morale.”

## **DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO:**

After Burma, the DRC is probably the country of the world with the largest number of child soldiers. A December 2000 UN report estimated that between 15 to 30 percent of all newly recruited combatants in the DRC were children under the age of 18, and that a substantial number were under age 12.

Although the government of the DRC has made a commitment to demobilization, there are still thousands of child soldiers in its ranks. On the opposition side, one of the aspects that we've looked at is the complicity of the governments of Uganda and Rwanda in recruiting and training child soldiers to fight with rebel forces in the DRC.

In northeastern Congo, thousands of children have been recruited by rebel factions with the direct assistance of the Ugandan army. Recruiters for the Congolese Rally for Democracy-Liberation Movement (Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Mouvement de Libération (RCD-ML), (later merged with the Front for the Liberation of Congo, FLC) would routinely tour villages on recruitment missions and return with a truckload of 100 to 200 children and youth, aged 13 to 18. Instructors from the Ugandan People's Defense Force would then provide three to six months of infantry and weapons training at Nyaluke camp. "We trained them rapidly," said one Human Rights Watch source. "The important thing was to learn how to use and maintain firearms." Conditions at the camp were terrible, and reportedly many children died from abuse and lack of health care. In mid-2000, Uganda also transported several hundred child soldiers to Uganda for training. UNICEF later got access to the children and arranged for their return home.

Rwanda has backed another opposition group, the RCD-Goma (Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma). HRW investigations found that RCD and Rwandan troops have conducted recruitment drives and taken children by force from schools, roadsides, markets and their homes. In some communities, because parents fear their children will be taken for use as soldiers, families have begun sleeping outdoors away from their homes, and schools have been closed. A former RCD instructor reported that after local schools in two localities were closed, recruiters began targeting churches. 500 children on their way to church were recruited on a single Sunday.

According to this recruiter, RPA officers often oversaw the training of child recruits:

*"[The children] were trained on how to use arms and how to shoot, and that was the end of it. Some of the kids were even sent to battle without arms. They were sent ahead of battle-ready troops of the RCD and RPA to create a diversion. They were ordered to make a lot of noise, using sticks on tree trunks and the like. When they succeeded in diverting the attention of government troops, that is to say when they drew government fire on their unarmed elements, these units, known as the Kadogo Commando, would be literally allowed to fall like flies under government fire. The experienced troops would then attack the governments troops when their attention was diverted to the Kadogo Commando."*

In one battle, the soldier said he had witnessed at least one hundred children killed, the vast majority unarmed. He later deserted RCD-Goma, because he objected to the recruitment of children.

In early April 2001, RCD-Goma authorities pledged to end the recruitment of child soldiers and demobilize those in their ranks. But just a few days later at a ceremony marking the end of a military training program at Mushaki, nearly 1800 of the 3000 graduates were children aged twelve to seventeen.

### **WHY CHILDREN ARE RECRUITED:**

Our work has provided some insight on *why* children are recruited as soldiers. Following are five factors:

- 1) Children are vulnerable and easy targets. In the DRC, one recruiter told us that children from the Lendu ethnicity were often targeted because earlier rounds of fighting had left thousands of children orphaned or unaccompanied. He said, “These were an easy target. There was no political design beyond this practical consideration.” In Burma, we found that soldiers are often given incentives to bring in new recruits, in the form of money, promotions or early discharge. They prey on children because they are vulnerable, and easy to intimidate and manipulate.
- 2) Children are often thought to more easily follow orders and don’t have the same inhibitions of adults. In Colombia, a guerilla commander told us “Children are more intrepid, they have more bravery for war. And although children are usually given no command responsibilities, they carry out their duties much better than an adult would.”
- 3) Children are considered dispensable. In the DRC, children are clearly recruited as cannon fodder, and sacrificed in large numbers to provide military advantage to older, more experienced troops. In other parts of the world, we also have seen children assigned to the most hazardous missions.
- 4) Modern weapons technology has made it as easy for them to handle weapons as their adult counterparts.
- 5) Their particular assets. As indicated by the names given to child soldiers in Colombia– “little bees” and “little bells” – children are also thought to have a comparative advantage over adults in launching surprise attacks and acting as early warning systems.

Some of the same qualities that make children desirable soldiers pose particular threats to opposing soldiers in the field. With their immature judgment and often lack of experience, the behavior of child soldiers may not conform to what is normally expected of soldiers. They may be on drugs. They almost certainly don’t know the rules of international humanitarian law. Older soldiers may be less likely to detect an impending attack when children are involved. They may be more reluctant to use deadly force against children. When they do shoot back at children, they may feel particular guilt or remorse afterwards.

A big challenge for militaries is what to do when they face child soldiers on the battlefield. A bigger challenge for all of us is to ensure that children are not recruited in the first place.

## *THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES:*

In May 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a new treaty, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. The protocol prohibits the forced recruitment of children under age eighteen or their participation in armed conflict. Since its adoption, it's been signed by over 100 governments and ratified by about 30. It went into force in February of this year.

The Protocol is currently being considered by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. It has the support of the Bush administration, of the Defense Department, the State Department, and of both Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

This protocol will not require changes in US military recruitment practices, but it will require changes in deployment. Past practice has been that the US armed forces have assigned soldiers to units, including combat units, as soon as they complete training. In the past, 17-year old US soldiers have served in conflict in Bosnia, the Gulf War and in Somalia. Under the protocol, this will have to change, and the armed forces will need "to take all feasible measures" to ensure that 17-year olds do not take a direct part in hostilities.

Despite the changes required, it is very important for the United States to support and implement this protocol.

- 1) The need for US leadership: As the world's leading military power, it is critical for the United States to lead by example.
- 2) Protection for US soldiers: As we've discussed, supporting international efforts to end the use of child soldiers can help protect US soldiers in the field.
- 3) The protocol has the support of the public: 93% of Americans say that combatants should be at least 18 years old.
- 4) The changes needed are minimal: The Defense Department says that by the time US soldiers finish their basic and technical training and are ready to be assigned to units, 99.76% have reached the age of eighteen. Ensuring that the remaining 0.24% are not sent into combat is not too much to ask.

Clearly, ending the use of child soldiers is important for human rights reasons, for humanitarian reasons and for security reasons. I'm encouraged that members of the US armed forces are willing to devote attention to this issue and hope that we can work together to address it. Thank you.



# Children At War

P.W. Singer

Brookings Institution

---

## Book Plan:



- 1 Introduction
- 2 Children At War: Past, Present, and Future  
Geographic Regions  
Girls At War
- 3 The Causes: Behind the Child Soldier Phenomenon
- 4 The Processes: Turning a Child Into a Soldier  
Recruitment  
Indoctrination and Training  
Use in Battle
- 5 Special Cases: Children of Terror
- 6 *The Impact and Implications of Children on the Battlefield*
- 7 Preventing Children From Joining the Fight
- 8 *The Dilemmas of Fighting Children*
- 9 The Post-War Challenge: Rehabilitation
- 10 Conclusions

## The Global Spread of child soldiers



Countries where child soldiers were Active Combatants 1998-2001 in **Bold**, Epicenters (Crossborder spillover) Circled

---

## Counting Children

76% of ongoing or recently ended conflicts (37 of the 55) have children beneath the age of 18 serving as combatants.	80% of these conflicts where children are present include fighters under the age of 15.
40% of the total armed organizations around the world (157 of 366) use child soldiers.	60% of the non-state armed forces in the world (77 of 129) use child soldiers.
23% of the armed organizations in the world (84 total) use children aged 15 and under in combat roles.	18% of them (64) use children 12 and under.
<b>More than 300,000 children are currently serving as combatants.</b> <b>Roughly 10% of all active combatants in the world are underage.</b>	

## The Ease of Force Generation



- Conflict Barriers to Entry Lowered
- Multiplied Fighting Power
- Conflict Persistence
- Rapid Regeneration

---

## The Proliferation of Violence



- Non-State Resistance
- The Devaluation of Ideology
- Rise of Fringe Groups

## The Mess that Children Make



- Institutionalized Violations of the Laws of War
- Civilian Targeting
- Higher Casualties From Cheapened Life Value

---

## The Conflict Merry-Go-Round



- Laying the Groundwork
- The Destruction of Childhood
- Increased Physical Needs
- Difficult Returns



# Operation Barras

- When: 09-10-00, 06.16 GMT
- Situation: Hostages from Royal Irish Regiment (UK) held at Rokel Creek Base, Sierra Leone
- Combatants:
  - West Side Boys      vs.    SAS
  - Para Regiment



---

## Prepare Thyself



- Train for Dilemmas
- Harmonize Doctrines
- Attune Intelligence
- Avoid Information Gap

# The Dilemma of Children At War



Photo © Martin Lueders

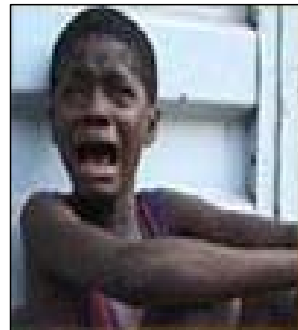
- The Threat from Children
- Force Protection
- The Audacity
- The Experience and Skills

---

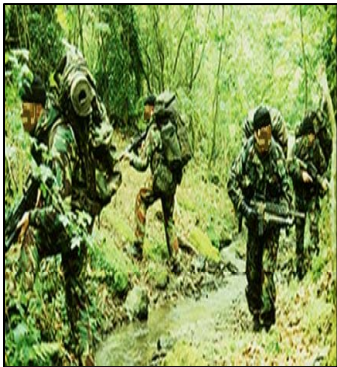
## The Hard Choices



- A New Casualty Aversion?
- The Effect on Morale
- The View Back Home



## Counter Doctrine: The Value of Shock



- Hold Threat at Distance
- Break the Threat Up
- Shape the Battlefield: Create Avenues



- Non-Lethal Weapons Possibilities

---

## Think Strategically



- The Importance of Follow-Through
- Control Recruitment Zones
- Protect Special At-Risk Groups
- PsyOps

## Deal with the Aftermath

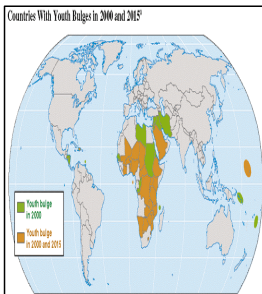


- Welcome Escapees
  - Assist Demilitarization
  - Psychological Needs Of Own Soldiers
  - Attuned Public Affairs
- 



## Conclusions

# The Lost Generation



- Underlying Mass Global Insecurity
  - 2nd Generation War Effects
  - Near Term Catastrophes
- 

## New Toys for Tots



- “The Kalashnikov Age”
- Improvements in Ease of Use and Efficiency
- Proliferation and Cheapening

# The New Child Labor Problem



- New Low Cost Recruit Pool
  - Context of Weakened States
  - Resource for Conflict Entrepreneurs
- 

## Child Recruitment



- Forced: Abduction and Impressment
- Special At-Risk Groups
- “Voluntary” Choices





# Converting Children to Soldiers



- Obedience Through Fear
  - Indoctrination Through Narcotics and Participation
  - Training
  - Action -Small Unit Tactics
-

**Caution: Children at War**  
**P.W. Singer**  
***Parameters* Winter 2001-2002**

After less than two weeks of training, the strike force of 150 British paratroopers deployed to the target zone, a ramshackle camp located in the jungles of Sierra Leone. At H-Hour, the assault group raced out from three RAF Chinook CH-47s, while three other helicopters laid down curtains of covering fire. At the same time, Special Air Service (SAS) snipers, who had waited for nearly a week in the surrounding swamps, opened up. Much of the force had to wade through chest-deep water and then hack through 150 meters of jungle while under fire, but they persevered to the objective: a collection of low huts where six hostages were held. The hostages were hurried into waiting choppers and the operation was quickly over. The fighting had been brief but "brutal." [1] Estimates of enemy dead ranged from 25 to 150. This British rescue assault, code-named Operation Barras, took place in September 2000, but received little attention in the United States. It merits mention not because it was a textbook operation lasting just 20 minutes, but rather because of the nature of the enemy: the "West Side Boys," a rogue militia primarily made up of children. In fact, the very reason for Operation Barras was that 16 days earlier, the "Boys" had seized a patrol from the British Royal Irish Regiment, deployed on military training duties. The soldiers had been surrounded and then captured when their squad commander was unwilling to fire on "children armed with AKs." [2] Operation Barras was one of the first Western engagements with this new, troubling feature of global violence. It illustrates a reality of contemporary conflict for which the US military is ill prepared. As we enter the 21st century, a new phenomenon of warfare has emerged, one quite different from the technical revolution in military affairs (RMA). While not a formal doctrine, it similarly represents a body of fundamental principles, deliberate instrumental choices, and transferred teachings. [3] In this case, it prescribes the methods and circumstances of employing children in battle. "Child soldiers" are generally defined as persons under 18 years of age engaged in deadly violence (of a non-criminal type) as part of an armed force. [4] Units made up of such fighters have become a fact of present-day warfare. Children are participating as active combatants in over 75 percent of the world's armed conflicts. It is nearly inevitable that American troops will have to contend with this feature of modern warfare at some point and also "find themselves face-to-face with a 14-year old carrying an AK-47." [5] Unfortunately, the issue of child soldiers is still a largely invisible one to American security studies. Most of our understanding of child soldiers comes not from within the field, but from advocacy efforts and the research side of pediatric medicine. Most worrisome, no doctrine has been developed for dealing with the specific challenges and dilemmas that child soldiers present to mission planners or deployed units. The reasons for this omission are unclear. It may be that the subject of children in warfare is thought too peripheral or too sensitive an issue for serious consideration. Or, it may be because it is difficult to take a dispassionate, hardheaded approach to a topic that so tugs at one's heartstrings. In any case, our failure to examine the phenomenon of child soldiers represents a gap that should be addressed. It touches on everything from the new dynamics of global conflicts to the rise of non-state actors in the military sphere. It may complicate the challenges US forces will face in future



interventions and peacekeeping operations. To remain relevant, military studies must address all the new actors in warfare, even the littlest ones.

### **Children at War: Past, Present, and Future**

Warfare always has been an almost exclusively adult domain. There were some instances in the past where male children did serve in the military, though not equal to active soldiers. Pages helped arm and maintain the knights of medieval Europe, while drummer boys were a requisite part of any 18th-century army. But in each case they fulfilled minor support roles and were not considered as true combatants. They neither dealt out death nor were considered legitimate targets. US troops have faced certain instances of children fighting in the last gasps of defeated states, most notably the VMI cadets at the Battle of New Market in 1864 and the arming of the *Hitler Jugend* when Allied armies entered Nazi Germany in 1945. [6] Some children also fought alongside some Cold-War rebel groups, including the Viet Cong. Each of these cases, however, was qualitatively different from a general practice; they were isolated in time, geographic space, and scope, and children were never an integral, essential part of the forces engaged. [7] They were exceptions to what the rule used to be. The nature of armed conflict, though, has changed greatly in the last few decades. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century closed, the role of children in battle had changed in many parts of the world from ancillary to primary. The case of the war in Sierra Leone reveals the extent of this change. The overall figure of child fighters for all sides there is between 15,000 and 20,000, putting them in the majority of total combatants; roughly 80 percent of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) organization is aged seven to 14. [8] As we enter the 21st century, child soldiers are serving on the battlefields of every continent but Australia and Antarctica. They have become integral parts of both organized military units and nonmilitary, but still violent, political organizations, such as terrorist groups. They serve in a variety of roles: infantry shock troops, raiders, sentries, spies, sappers, and porters. In short, the participation of children in armed conflict is global in scope and massive in number, a far greater phenomenon than suggested by the scant attention it has received. In the Americas in the 1990s, child soldiers served in fighting in El Salvador, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Peru. The most substantial current number is in Colombia. There they are nicknamed "little bells" by the military, which uses them as expendable sentries, and "little bees" by the guerillas, because they "sting" their enemies before they know they are under attack. Up to 30 percent of some guerilla units are made up of children, while some militia units are 85 percent children. [9] In Europe, child fighters have been present in Chechnya, Daghestan, Kosovo, and Nagorno-Karabakh. The biggest European user of child soldiers is the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). From 1994, it started to recruit children systematically and even created children's regiments. In 1998, it was reported that the PKK had 3,000 children within its ranks, the youngest being seven years old. [10] Africa is often considered to be the epicenter of the phenomenon. Armed groups using child soldiers are present in nearly every one of its wars. Some 16,000 child soldiers fought in the Liberian conflict. [11] A 1995 survey revealed that 36 percent of all Angolan children had served as or accompanied soldiers in combat. [12] Of particular note is the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, renowned--or rather infamous--for being made up almost exclusively of child soldiers. During its ten-year fight with the government, it has abducted over

12,000 children to turn into soldiers. The LRA also holds the record for the world's youngest reported armed combatant, at age five. [13] In the Middle East and Asia, there has been a proliferation of armed groups and a concurrent rise in the number of child soldiers. Students from Pakistani religious schools (*madrassas*) made up the bulk of Taliban forces in their initial takeover. Young teens are at the center of fighting in Lebanon, Palestine (70 percent of the *Intifada*), Laos, Philippines, Cambodia, and Kashmir. Myanmar alone has tens of thousands of child soldiers. The spillover effects of this recruitment were tragically illustrated in January 2000 when young members of the Karen "God's Army" took hundreds of hostages. The adolescent guerillas were subsequently killed at a hospital across the border in Thailand. (The leaders of "God's Army," the enigmatic Luther and Johnny Htoo, 12-year-old twin brothers, recently surrendered to Thai security forces.) While armed rebel groups have made extensive use of child fighters, their use is by no means limited to non-state actors. The UN estimates that in addition to the 300,000 currently active child combatants (a conservative figure given the number of conflicts not included in the UN survey), over 50 states actively recruit children into their military forces, usually in violation of both international and their own domestic laws. [14] Another new wrinkle of the child soldier phenomenon is that it defies gender boundaries. In the isolated instances in the past when children were used on the battlefield, they were generally boys. Now, while the majority of child soldiers are still male, roughly 30 percent of the world's armed groups that employ child soldiers include girls. [15] The most significant perhaps is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), fighting in Sri Lanka since the mid-1980s. The group systematically recruits children and has even gone so far as to establish the LTTE *Bakuts* ("Baby Brigade"), made up of fighters aged 16 and under. Roughly half of the LTTE troops are women and girls, recruited from ages as young as ten. They are deliberately chosen for suicide bomber missions because they may not undergo as close a body search at checkpoints as men. In sum, child soldiering is a global problem that occurs more systematically than previously suspected. It is important to note that these are not just children on the borderline of adulthood, but in many cases include those considered underage by any cultural standard. The statistics are telling:

- Seventy-six percent of ongoing or recently ended conflicts (37 of the 55) have had children beneath the age of 18 serving as combatants.
- Eighty percent of these conflicts where children have been present included fighters under the age of 15.
- Forty percent of the total armed organizations around the world (157 of 366, a figure that includes both state militaries and all armed non-state groups operating in a politico-military context) use child soldiers.
- Sixty percent of the non-state armed forces in the world (77 of 129) use child soldiers.
- Twenty-three percent of the armed organizations in the world (84 total) use children aged 15 and under in combat roles.
- Eighteen percent of them (64) use children aged 12 and under. [16] Further, while the generally accepted total world figure of 300,000 child soldiers may be a somewhat small percentage of the overall number of armed personnel in the world, it makes up a larger part of actual forces involved in ongoing conflicts. Roughly ten percent of all current combatants in the world are children. [17]

### **Causes: Behind the Child Soldier Phenomenon**

The recruitment and use of child soldiers is one of the most flagrant violations of international norms. Besides being contrary to the general constructs of the last four millennia of warfare, the practice is prohibited by a number of relevant treaties codified in international law. [18] However, these conventions are extensively ignored and, instead, the presence of child soldiers on the battlefield has become a widespread practice at the turn of the century. Thus, for professional military forces who will face them in the future, it is important to understand the dynamics of this phenomenon. The recruitment and use of child soldiers is a deliberate and systematic choice. The reasons behind this conscious violation of international norms are complex, but involve three critical factors that form a causal chain: (1) generational disconnections caused by globalization, war, and disease create a pool of potential recruits; (2) efficiency improvements in small arms permit these recruits to be effective participants in warfare; which (3) results in the propensity to use children as a low-cost way to mobilize and generate force, particularly for individual goals in the context of failed or weak states. Let us look at each of these three factors in turn.

*The Lost Generation* The desperate position that many children around the world find themselves in is almost unimaginable. The magnitude of global human insecurity is stunning in all its measures, from the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty to the one billion rural residents who are landless. [19] Most important in the current context, the brunt of such social problems falls on the youngest segments of the population. Substantial proportions of the world's children are undereducated, malnourished, marginalized, and disaffected. As the population continues to swell to nine billion by 2025, this will worsen. Child soldiers are drawn from this reserve. Those forcibly recruited are usually from special risk groups--street children, the rural poor, and refugees--while those who choose to enlist are often from the same groups, driven to do so by poverty, propaganda, and alienation. Adding to this, the wars of the past decade have created a follow-on generation of orphans and others dislocated and disaffected. Other short-term catastrophes such as famine and disease outbreaks contribute to this trend. Of particular worry is the enduring nature of the AIDS epidemic, particularly in Africa. Seventy percent of those suffering from HIV live in Africa, where two million died last year. This will create a generation of new orphans for the following decades. [20] It will also debilitate the very institutions needed to solidify the state, "gradually weakening the capacity of militaries to defend their nations and maintain civil order." [21]

*New Toys for Tots* A concurrent trend necessary to the phenomenon's expansion has been the proliferation of inexpensive light weapons. Rarely mentioned in analyses of world threats, which typically focus on the most complex and expensive systems, light weapons (rifles, grenades, light machine guns, land mines, and other "child-portable" systems) are the weapons most often used in contemporary warfare and produce 80 to 90 percent of all casualties. [22] Technological and efficiency advances in these weapons permit the transformation of children into lethal fighters. For most of human history, weapons relied on the brute strength and long-term training of the operator, which was prohibitive to the effective use of children as soldiers. For example, a child not fully matured could not bear the physical burdens of serving in the phalanx. Even until just a generation ago, personal battlefield weapons were still heavy and bulky, generally limiting children's

participation. [23] But improvements in manufacturing, such as the incorporation of plastics, now make modern weapons--particularly automatic rifles—so light that small children can use them as effectively as adults. Just as important, most small arms have been simplified in their use, to the extent that they can be stripped, reassembled, and fired by a child below the age of ten. With only a few hours of training, a youngster can be taught all he or she needs to know in order to kill. At the same time, vast increases have been made in the lethality of small arms, multiplying their destructive power. Modern assault rifles give a handful of children the equivalent firepower of an entire Napoleonic regiment. As these weapons have grown in ease of use and destructive power, they have also proliferated in number and fallen in price. Due to the post-Cold War surplus, there are an estimated 550 million small arms floating around the globe, making them startlingly cheap and easily accessible. [24] In Uganda, an AK-47 can be purchased for the cost of a chicken, while in northern Kenya it can be bought for the price of a goat. [25] *The New Child Labor Problem* The result is that children are now easily transformed into soldiers and the nature of conflict is altered. Once children and battlefield weapons were incompatible; now they combine to create what one might conceptualize as a new pool of military labor. Children, considered in some societies as expendable assets, now represent an easy and low-cost way to mobilize armed force. The practice has been particularly prominent in the context of vulnerable or failed states. It has been a way for even the weakest and most unpopular organizations to generate significant amounts of force with almost no investment. In most cases, there has been a direct link to ready commodities that provided willing conflict entrepreneurs the incentive to quickly seize what they could. [26] Even when personal profit has not been the case, in wartime situations there is always motivation to assemble military force. Where there are not enough adults available or willing to become soldiers, children have now become a solution. This may be because overwhelming losses from an enduring conflict or disease have eliminated the older pool of conscripts, or it may be because of the unpopularity of an organization's cause. As the map shown earlier illustrates, use of child soldiers has a certain geographic clustering, perhaps indicating cross-border spillovers. Another mechanism for the extension of the practice has actually been through deliberate transfer of knowledge and experience. The Lal Sena group in Nepal began to use child fighters after training and consultation with the Shining Path rebel group in Peru and Indian militant groups, indicating teaching pathways for the practice's spread. [27] Highly personalized or purely predatory armed groups, such as warlords or religious fringe groups, are particularly dependent on this new labor source. They can transform children into soldiers and thus transform an insignificant force into an army. The classic example of the rationale behind using children as an alternate military labor source is Charles Taylor in Liberia. In the early 1990s he turned an "army" of 150 amateur soldiers armed with small arms into a force of thousands by the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Today, he is Liberia's president, demonstrating the potential payoff. Through child soldiers, he was able to use a small gang to gain a kingdom.

### **Dynamics: Turning a Child into a Soldier**

The essence of the child soldier phenomenon is that the processes involved are simple. The ultimate aim is to foster a dependency that binds children to their armed organization.

*Recruitment* Case studies indicate that the primary recruitment method is abduction. Typically, recruiting parties are given conscription targets that change according to need and objective. Some groups even use sophisticated computerized population databases to direct recruiting efforts. All children are not automatically taken, only those who meet certain criteria. Those judged too small are often killed in order to intimidate both the local populace and the new recruits. Once caught, children have no choice; usually they must comply with their captors or die. To maximize efficiency, both state armies and rebel groups target the places that they know children will be both vulnerable and in the greatest number. The most frequent targets are secondary schools, marketplaces, and refugee camps. In many ways, these tactics echo the naval press gangs of the Napoleonic era. The difference is that abductions are not just about building one's force, but are also instruments of war. Abduction raids often turn to rape and looting rampages. [28] Some children choose to join an armed group of their own volition. However, to describe this choice as "voluntary" is misleading. [29] Leaving aside that they are not yet of an age considered able to make mature decisions, many are driven into conflict by pressures beyond their control, usually economic in nature. Hunger and poverty are endemic in conflict zones, and children, particularly those orphaned or disengaged from civil society, may volunteer to join any group that guarantees regular meals. The same factors may also drive parents to offer their children for combat service. Structural conditions may also oblige children to join armed organizations. If surrounded by violence and chaos, they may decide they are safer with guns in their hands. Revenge can also be a particularly powerful impetus to join. [30] Last, some groups may take deliberate advantage of adolescence, a stage in life where identity is still defining. Through propaganda or media distortion, violence may be glorified or fictions created to induce children to self-identify with an organization. [31] *Conversion, Training, and Action: Obedience through Fear* The recruitment of children is only the first step. They quickly are made dependent on their leaders for their every need. Adding liberal doses of terror and propaganda makes the impressionable children begin to identify with causes they barely understand. Discipline within such groups is maintained by extreme and often arbitrary violence, used as both a conversion method and a deterrent to questioning authority. A particularly gruesome tactic among the groups most dependent on child soldiers is to force captured children to take part in ritualized killings very soon after their abduction. The victims may be POWs, other children seized for the purpose of being killed by the recruits, or, most heinous of all, the children's neighbors or parents. Any recruits who balk risk becoming the victims themselves, forcing the most terrible choice upon a child. The children are recruited for military purposes, so they are quickly put to this task. Typically, they are given short instruction in the most basic infantry skills: how to fire and clean their weapons, lay landmines, set an ambush, and so forth. The time period of training tends to range from a single day to four months, well short of common standards, but enough to learn to kill. Their instructors may even be other child soldier "veterans." Once minimally trained, most new recruits are quickly set out on the battlefield. For rebel groups, the standard unit tactic is to place them in small, platoon-sized groups (roughly 30-40 children) under the command of a few adults. Typically, they are grouped by age.

These units tend to stay on the move and operate as raiding parties. Since they usually target civilians or ambush much smaller units or outposts, their effect can be devastating. The employment of child soldiers by state militaries is situationally dependent. Typically, in unpopular guerilla wars they are mixed in with standard units of adult soldiers. In conventional wars, they are often brought in as stopgap measures and set out on their own in the frontlines to disrupt enemy formations. Despite their negligible training, their often-cruel indoctrination means that young children can quickly be turned into the fiercest of fighters. Weakened psychologically and fearful of their commanders, they can become obedient killers, willing to take on the most dangerous and horrifying assignments. Young children rarely fully appreciate the dangers of the battlefield. The result is that in the midst of combat they get overly excited and take undue risks. This tendency toward fearlessness is deliberately exploited by many organizations and even reinforced by forcing the children to take drugs or alcohol. The result is that, in the words of one observer in Sierra Leone, "Children make very effective combatants. Victims and witnesses often said they feared the children more than the adults because the child combatants had not developed an understanding of the value of life. They would do anything. They knew no fear. Especially when they were pumped up on drugs. They saw it as fun to go into battle." [32] When child soldier's attack unarmed civilians the results can be catastrophic. Child soldiers also have proven to be quite effective, however, even when facing regular adult troops. Their audacity, plus their sheer numbers and firepower, sometimes can compensate for their lack of training (and in fact, adults in developing state armies may often be even less trained). In December 1997, the Leopard brigade of the LTTE, its elite child soldier formation primarily made up of orphans, was able to surround and kill nearly 200 Sri Lankan army commandos. The loss demoralized the whole army, as these soldiers were considered the force's vanguard. *Loyalty vs. Escape* Once indoctrinated, many child soldiers do not want to leave their new lives. The general threshold appears to be around one year or longer in the organization. By this point, the children's own self-concept has become solidly entwined with their captors. Some grow physically and psychologically addicted to the drugs that their adult leaders supply. Others gain a sense of identity within the small units or even develop the bonds of combat that keep them from deserting their fellow child soldiers. However, the critical factor that binds children to the group is fear--fear of what would happen if they attempt to flee and are caught. Escape is quite difficult. Other fighters, including other children, almost always surround them and are equally fearful of what would happen to them if they do not turn the escapees in. For children within state armies, to flee, even for a child, is to commit desertion, which under many military codes is punishable by firing squad. Within rebel groups, the punishments are typically more ritualized, with the execution providing an opportunity for further indoctrination. Those children caught fleeing usually are killed by other children, often with edged handheld weapons, in order to make it more personal for each executioner. Despite these overwhelming risks, vast numbers of child soldiers run at any opportunity. Some hate their new lives, some do it out of terror, and some just miss their families. Of the thousands abducted, there are also thousands who have escaped. Most of these have fled when a sudden opportunity presented itself, often in the heat and chaos of a military engagement. Their organization's hold is usually short-term, dependent on the tight observation commanders keep.

## Implications of Child Soldiers

The child soldier phenomenon portends a number of changes in conflict dynamics that should concern US military planners. Unfortunately, none of them can be considered positive. *Increase in Violent Conflicts due to the Ease of Force Generation* Children are targeted for recruitment because they represent a quick, easy, and, most importantly, low-cost way for armed organizations to generate force. Any organization willing to use children as fighters will be able to field a force well beyond what they would be able to field without them, literally multiplying their fighting numbers. Groups which previously would not have been considered military threats can now field dangerous forces or, at the very least, easily disrupt civil society through the targeting of unarmed civilians. This ease also affects conflict persistence. Organizations that use children are sometimes able to endure conditions that would break forces that do not. Some state militaries will deploy massive numbers of child soldiers as a stopgap measure to delay defeat, creating valuable breathing space for their regular army to regroup and rebuild. The Ethiopians successfully used such a strategy in 1998 against Eritrea. Likewise, rebel groups that depend on child soldiers are able to rapidly regenerate battlefield losses. Only a small core of adult fighters is needed to maintain the organization. During the 1990s the RUF in Sierra Leone was completely routed in two separate instances, but each time used abducted children to return to strength. *The Proliferation of Violence and the Devaluation of Ideology* The use of children also means that the connections between the motivations of the group's leaders and its likely success in fielding a combat organization are broken. By pulling in their recruits through abduction, causes that enjoy no grassroots support are still able to mobilize. They are also less likely to die out because of their unpopularity. Many conflicts fueled by child fighters have been simply about personal greed. The result is that political agendas are increasingly less necessary to the maintenance of warfare, as the examples of Myanmar, Liberia, Uganda, and Sierra Leone graphically illustrate. The groups are also more predatory and destructive in their operations, as they have less incentive to establish good governance and don't depend on the prosperity of their host communities. [33] Finally, the use of child fighters allows fringe movements, which would have been marginalized in the past, now to become quite powerful forces, spurring further conflict. These include even the most bizarre, such as the LRA in Uganda, fighting to bring back respect for the biblical Ten Commandments, which under its leader's interpretation includes the torture, rape, and killing of children, the use of sex slaves, and the prohibition of bicycles. [34] The LRA has a core of 200 believers, but fields a force of up to 12,000 abducted children and has been able to stay at war for over a decade. *The Mess that Children Make* The presence of children on the battlefield also adds to the chaos of war, making greater levels of atrocities more likely. This higher level of bloodshed, in turn, makes conflicts more intractable. [35] While any number of groups use killings, rape, and torture as a part of their tactics to breed fear, using children as soldiers makes these violations an inherent part of the conflict. The intrinsic methods of recruitment and indoctrination of children entail massive violations of the laws of war. Atrocities play a central role in the methods used to turn children into soldiers. Likewise, the normative protections afforded wounded or prisoners of war are often ignored. Rebel groups with child soldiers typically kill their enemy's wounded or prisoners on the spot or bring them back to camp to kill as instructive victims. Civilians, in particular, bear the brunt of child soldier attacks. This strategy is in opposition to

traditional guerilla doctrine of winning local support so as to blend into the environment. [36] The result is that when children are present in a conflict, experience has shown that they are among the most vicious combatants in the war; indeed, the younger child soldiers are, the more vicious they tend to be. [37] Children are also more likely to suffer greater losses. Many commanders deliberately exploit them in two primary methods: using children as shields or as cannon fodder. The first is the use of children to protect the lives of an organization's leaders and its better trained, and thus considered more valuable, adult soldiers. Children are most often the personnel used to explore suspected minefields, usually through simple trial and error. Children are used as direct shields at checkpoints or when ambushes or battles loom, while commanders remain safely hidden. Children are also commonly used in suicide missions or "human wave" attacks, where the tactic is designed to overpower a well-fortified opposition through sheer weight of numbers. Their value is that they provide extra targets for the enemy to deal with and expend ammunition on. Those who do not run in the direction of the gunfire are beaten or killed. Such attacks can be quite effective in overwhelming a force. In 1996, the LTTE used them to overrun the Multavi military complex in Sri Lanka, killing 1,173 out of 1,240 government soldiers. The casualty rates for child soldiers have been much higher than those for equivalent adult units. Since 1995, 60 percent of LTTE personnel killed in combat have been children aged ten to 16. Twenty percent were girls. [38] *Child Soldiers and the Conflict Merry-Go-Round* the dangers involved in introducing children into war do not stop at a conflict's termination, for each instance lays the groundwork for future fighting. In many ways, the child soldiers bear greater burdens after the conflict is over than their adult counterparts. Many have been forced to commit atrocities against their own families and communities, or have suffered physical disabilities or psychological scars, which are heightened by their youth. Most have special rehabilitation needs. Or, because they were removed from school at an early age, they may have no skills other than killing and being able to fieldstrip weapons. Perhaps, though, the most serious long-term consequence of the phenomenon of child soldiers is *how it disrupts their psychological and moral development. The practice plunges them into a system where killing is sanctioned, inculcating a culture of impunity hard to reverse. The resulting tendency for more violence contributes to the difficulty peacekeeping forces experience when trying to integrate hostile groups into a united society.* **Opposing Child Soldiers: The Value of Shock and Follow-Through** The underlying conditions that have led to the use of child soldiers (global poverty and disconnection, the spread of small arms, and weakened states) can be dealt with only in the long term. Norms against child soldiering have proven to be insufficient, so stigmatization of those who abuse children in this manner must be backed up with real punishments. These include prosecuting the use of children in combat as a war crime, and discouraging the practice by denying sponsoring governments or non-state organizations legitimacy and judiciously designing sanctions to proscribe trade with them. Likewise, current US military aid, training programs, and weapon sales to countries that use child soldiers should be suspended until they remove these illegal recruits. [39] Despite such sanctions, US troops still will likely have to contend one day with facing children in battle, possibly in the near future. Military planners need to recognize that child soldiers are an inescapable new feature of the modern battlefield and make appropriate tactical adjustments. American soldiers need to be prepared for the hard dilemmas they



will face in this eventuality. Operation Barras illustrates the differences between encounters with child soldier units and other regular armed forces. In some ways, child soldier units have certain weaknesses that can be exploited, but only if the professional force makes the proper adjustments. For example, US military doctrine in small wars traditionally has focused on attrition, large amounts of firepower, and the total destruction of the enemy. [40] When encountering child soldiers, these principles may be counterproductive. The resulting negative public reactions could undermine the entire operation. A key when facing child units is to recognize that the opposition is made up of soldiers who are often looking for a way out. The center of gravity is the hold that leaders have on their troops, with a primary task being the breaking of that chain. Ex-child soldiers reveal that they were often just waiting until fighting broke out to steal away in the confusion, if that was possible. If the adult leader is killed or forced to take cover, the whole organization often breaks down. Some children simply drop their weapons; others flee into the bush. LRA escapees tell of how, if this command link were broken, their entire unit would disappear within seconds. [41] If it were not, they would fight on with fervor. Traditional targeting and set-piece movement will be less effectual than the creation of avenues and openings. For quick and less-costly results, a force should "fire-for shock" rather than "fire for effect." Chaos and confusion are more valued than pure destruction, such that heavy use of smoke and demonstrative air, armor, and artillery fires will often be enough to break down a force based on child soldiers. One is reminded of the axiom that in bush skirmishes, "he who makes the biggest noise wins." Helicopter gun ships have been found to be particularly intimidating and thus most effective, to the extent that many describe the one privately contracted gunship in Sierra Leone as more valuable in stopping the child-based RUF than the entire UN and Sierra Leone armies combined. An emphasis on shock will also likely cost fewer lives on both sides. The possible combination with non-lethal technologies should be explored. The irony is that such tactics run contrary to the direction many militaries have taken toward lighter and more sophisticated forces. As an observer of the Barras operation noted, "You cannot resolve a situation like this with a laser-guided bomb from 30,000 feet." Soldiers in peacekeeping operations, which are the most likely situations for Western militaries to come into contact with child soldiers, may be the most ill equipped of all to respond. They are often lightly armed, lacking in the types of heavy weapons that can shock. Indeed, in each situation where peacekeeping forces have run into the most difficulty, they have been small-arms-based, light-infantry forces, lacking in heavy weapons support. [42] Militaries currently reconfiguring their forces for intervention, such as the restructuring ongoing in Europe, would do well to remember the continuing importance of having firepower available for deterrence, demonstrations, and, if necessary, use as backup, even in peacekeeping operations. US forces should make certain to deploy only with the equipment packages necessary to accomplish these tasks. The defeat of a child-soldier-based opposition does not stop at the first encounter, no matter how successful. Measures must be taken quickly to welcome the child escapees, so as to induce others to follow, while at the same time preventing the adult leaders from regrouping. A flaw in Operation Barras was that there was limited follow-through, and a core group of leaders escaped, possibly to regroup. This means that while a fairly passive defense is best suited for the first stage, after contact, active measures must be taken to search out and run down the leadership. This will require both patience and the use of small units of

dedicated counterinsurgency specialists. That fact that units based on child soldiers are most vulnerable to shock tactics should not be interpreted to mean that they do not constitute very real threats. Tactical leaders must be aware that child soldier forces are often well armed and can cause great damage to an unprepared force. Moreover, when not immediately broken down, they tend to operate with terrifying audacity, taking risks that regular soldiers might not anticipate. When deployed in an area known to have child soldiers present, forces should take added cautions to counter and keep the threat at a distance, including putting children through the same inspections and scrutiny as adults. Intelligence should be attuned to what method of recruitment the opposition uses and the average child soldier's period of service. Opponents using impressment tactics or with recent cadres will be more prone to dissolving under shock than those with voluntary recruits or with children having been in service for more than a year. Before deployment, US troops should receive training in children's rights, and, if possible, operations in areas where child soldiers might be encountered should include personnel with special expertise in this area. Eventually, US troops will be placed in the difficult position of having to fire on a child for their own protection. Military leaders need to be aware of this terrible dilemma and prepare their soldiers with strict guidelines regarding this scenario. They must also be ready to deal with its aftermath, for this is an added way that the use of child soldiers puts professional forces at a disadvantage. It is especially demoralizing for professional militaries to be forced to fight and kill children. For example, even though there was little dilemma or controversy over actions against the *Hitler Jugend* troops in 1945, the experience was so unsettling that US troop morale was brought to its lowest point, despite the end of the war being in sight. [43] The effect would be increased in intervention or peacekeeping missions, where the rationale for becoming involved is more open-ended. During its peace intervention into Sri Lanka, the Indian army was so worn down by its experience versus the child cadres of the LTTE that it pressured its leadership into terminating the mission. This last point underscores the proviso that force should be used only when and where the mission objectives warrant it. The eventuality of engaging child soldiers will be a terrible tragedy regardless of the mission rationale. The added misfortune would be if subsequent media images undermine domestic support. Public affairs specialists need to be prepared for the aftermath of such engagements and stress the context under which they occurred and the overall mission's importance. Finally, troops deployed into operational zones where child soldiers are present should work to break the circle of violence. Forces should make every effort to greet and support escapees in a positive manner. Effective programs should be designed to replace the former organization's negative influence by immediately providing for the children's basic needs--such as food, clothing, and shelter--while at the same working to reunite them with their immediate or extended families. Close cooperation with aid agencies will be required. An additional task is that forces must also provide added protection to recent escapees and holding facilities that are often targeted by raiding parties, such as rehabilitation camps that house a pool of already trained recruits. In Sierra Leone, no such safeguard was afforded by the UN peacekeeping force, so when the war flared up, the children were simply re-abducted.

### **Suggested Guidelines When Engaging Child Soldiers**

1. Intelligence: Be attuned to the specific makeup of the opposition force.

2. Force Protection: All children are not threats, but may require the same scrutiny as adults.
3. Engagement: Operate with awareness of the situation's dynamics.
  - a) Fire for shock when possible.
  - b) Shape the opposition by creating avenues for escape.
  - c) Leader's control is the center of gravity, so engage adult targets first if possible.
4. Aftermath: Units may require special post-conflict treatment (akin to what police receive after shooting incidents).
5. Break the Cycle: Deployed units should support rehabilitation efforts

## Conclusions

Until recently, there was no need think about what American forces should do when they encounter armed units made up of children. The practice of using children in battle was not only impractical but also unthinkable. Changes at the turn of the century now mean there is barely a recent conflict that has not seen child combatants. Some conflicts are in fact sustained by their presence. The ramifications of this new phenomenon are quite dangerous. The use of child soldiers permits a multiplication of potential conflict groups, making wars both more likely and bloodier. It also entails higher levels of atrocities. Simply put, "children with AKs" are a new feature of the modern battlefield, and US forces will have to deal with the dilemmas they present at some point. The responses made so far have been limited in their effectiveness. Political and military analysts have been slow to study the issue, while governments have been slow to address the underlying conditions that facilitate it. For US military planners, now is the time to pay greater attention to the phenomenon's unique particularities, so that appropriate responses can be designed. Child soldier incidents will come sooner or later. The pertinent question is whether American troops will be prepared.

## Notes

1. Marie Colvin and James Clark. "How the Hi-Tech Army Fell Back on Law of the Jungle and Won," *The Sunday Times*, 17 September 2000, Internet, <http://www.sunday-times.co.uk/news/pages/sti/2000/09/17/stifgnafr03003.html>.
2. Major Alan Marshall as quoted in Al Venter, "Sierra Leone: A Disreputable Debacle," *Soldier of Fortune*, January 2001. In the end, more children died because of this decision, illustrating the dilemmas tactical commanders face.
3. One might even go so far as to suggest that the use of children in war represents an emerging "doctrine" in many regions. "Doctrine is defined as the body of theory within which the armed forces must operate, prescribing the methods and circumstances of their employment. Doctrinal provisions are generalizations gleaned from past experience about what functions well." David Keithley and Paul Melshen, "Past as Prologue: USMC Small Wars Doctrine," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 8 (Autumn 1997), 88. For other extrapolations on "doctrine" see US Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1-02, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, internet, <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrineljel/doddict/data/d/02018.html>, accessed 15 February 2000; and Gunther E. Rothenberg, "Maurice of Nassau, Gustavus Adolphus, Raimondo Montecuccoli, and the 'Military Revolution' of the Seventeenth Century," in *Makers of*

*Modern Strategy*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986), particularly pp. 40-42.

4. Center for Defense Information (CDI), "The Invisible Soldiers: Child Combatants," *The Defense Monitor*, 26 (No. 4, 1997), Internet, <http://www.cdi.org/dm/1997/issue4/>. The 18-year-old definition is drawn from the UNICEF international standard of age of maturity and is encoded in the international laws of war described later.

5. Human Rights Watch, "Clinton Hailed for Signing Ban on Child Combatants," press release, New York, 5 July 2000, internet, [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org). Efforts to stop the use of child soldiers will not only help children internationally, but may ultimately help American forces as well.

6. Guido Knopp, *Hitler's Kinder* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann, 2000); Philip Baker, *Youth Led by Youth* (London: Vilmor Publications, 1989).

7. New Market was the first and only major battle in the United States to see their use, and involved a total of 257 cadets. No other states in that period rushed to copy the example. "Report on the Battle of New Market Virginia and aftermath, part 1, May 15, 1864," from the VMI Annual Report, July 1864, General Francis H. Smith, Superintendent, original document in the VMI archives, Internet, <http://www.vmi.edu/~archtml/cwnmrpt.html>. Both sides in the US Civil War, however, had soldiers as young as 16 years old. Regarding the Viet Cong, children were used as spies and sentries.

8. Save the Children, "Children of the Gun," *Children in Crisis* project report, September 2000, Internet, [www.savethechildren.org/crisis](http://www.savethechildren.org/crisis).

9. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "The Use of Child Soldiers in Americas: An Overview," internet, [http://www.us-childsoldiers.org/child\\_soldiers/child-sold.html](http://www.us-childsoldiers.org/child_soldiers/child-sold.html); Human Rights Watch, "Child Soldiers Used by All Sides in Colombia's Armed Conflict," press release, New York, 8 October 1998, internet, <http://www.hrw.org/hrw/press98/oct/childsold1008.htm>. Given the increasing involvement of the United States in the conflict, this must be a concern.

10. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *The Use of Children by OSCE Member States*, Human Dimension Seminar on Children and Armed Conflict, Warsaw, 23-26 May 2000, internet, <http://www.child-soldiers.org/>.

11. "Child Soldiers: UN Representative Calls for Further Action," UN Foundation, 10 October 2000, Internet, [www.crin.org/conflict](http://www.crin.org/conflict).

12. Richard Reid, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children's Rights," *International Pediatric Association Journal*, 6 (October 1995), Internet, [http://www.ipa-france.net/pubs/inches/inch6\\_4/reid.htm](http://www.ipa-france.net/pubs/inches/inch6_4/reid.htm).

13. The RUF in Sierra Leone is next with a 6-year-old, followed by a number of armed groups with 7- and 8-year-olds. Rädda Barnen, Swedish Save the Children, *Child war* database, principal investigator: Henric Häggström, Internet, <http://www.rb.se:8082/www/childwar.nsf/HTML/Forsta?openDocument>, accessed November 2000.

14. This 300,000 figure is from a series of 26 country case studies, conducted by the UN and several members of the advocacy community. United Nations, Report of the Expert of the Secretary-General, Graça Machel, on the "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children," Document A/51/306 & Add 1, 26 August 1996, internet,

[gopher://gopher.un.org:70/00/ga/docs/51/plenary/A51-306.EN](http://gopher.un.org:70/00/ga/docs/51/plenary/A51-306.EN), accessed 7 September 2001; "Children of the Gun," *Children in Crisis* project report, internet, [www.savethechildren.org/crisis](http://www.savethechildren.org/crisis), accessed September 2000; the government estimate is from Rachel Stohl, "The Smallest Warriors: Child Soldiers," Center for Defense Information Report, October 1999, Internet, <http://www.cdi.org/atp/ChildSoldiers/resources.html>.

15. Data from *Rädda Barnen, Swedish Save the Children*, Child war database.

16. Ibid. These figures also blunt the spurious arguments that the standards against the use of child soldiers are Western-derived. No culture considers its members mature at these young ages, nor do their prior histories of warfare indicate such use of pre-teen warriors.

17. Data on overall combatant figures from *SIPRI Yearbook 2000: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), Appendix IA; *Uppsala Conflict Data Project*, Internet, <http://www.hotel.uu.se/pcr/data.htm>.

18. At the international level, these include the 1945 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions of 1949, and the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions. The UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, the UN Commission on Human Rights, and the International Labor Organization are among the international bodies that have condemned the practice, not to mention the global grassroots effort of the nongovernmental sort. At the regional level, the Organization for African Unity, the Economic Community of West African States, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Parliament have also denounced the use of child soldiers.

19. Michael Renner, "The Global Divide: Socioeconomic Disparities and International Security," in *World Security: Challenges for a New Century*, ed. Michael Klare and Yogesh Chandrani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 275.

20. CNN, "Hundreds walk out on Mbeki at AIDS Conference," Internet, [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com), posted 10 July 2000.

21. US State Department, *US International Response to HIV/AIDS* (Washington: US State Department, January 1999). Estimates of HIV infection rates among regional armies in Africa include 50 percent of all troops in Congo and Angola, 66 percent in Uganda, 75 percent in Malawi, and 80 percent in Zimbabwe. Claire Bisseret, "Africa's Military Time Bomb," *Johannesburg Financial Mail*, 11 December 1998.

22. Michael Klare, "The Kalashnikov Age," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 55 (January/February 1999), 18-22, Internet, <http://www.bullatombsci.org/issues/1999/jf99/jf99klare.html>.

23. CDI, "Invisible Soldiers."

24. Jasit Singh, *Light Weapons and International Security* (New Delhi: Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis, 1995).

25. United Nations, 1996. The equivalent is about \$5 (US).

26. Paul Collier, *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy*, World Bank Report, 15 June 2000.

27. Alex Spillius, "Red Army Brings Terror to Land of the Gurkhas," *The Electronic Telegraph*, Issue 1961, 7 October 2000.

28. Mike Wessells, "Child Soldiers," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 53 (November/December 1997), 32-39, internet, <http://www.bullatomsci.org/issues/1997/nd97/nd97wessells.html>.
29. CDI, "The Invisible Soldiers."
30. Ibid.
31. Wessells, p. 35.
32. Radio Netherlands, "Child Soldiers."
33. Robert Bates, "Prosperity and Violence: The Political Economy of Development," address at the Center for International Development, Cambridge, Mass., May 2000.
34. Amnesty International, "'Breaking God's Commands': The Destruction of Childhood by the Lord's Resistance Army," Amnesty International Africa Report, AFR 59/01/97, 18 September 1997; "They'd Make You Kill Your Parents," *The Toronto Star News*, 23 July 2000, Internet, [http://www.thestar.com/thestar/back\\_issues/ED20000723/news/20000723NEW01\\_FODIMANNO.html](http://www.thestar.com/thestar/back_issues/ED20000723/news/20000723NEW01_FODIMANNO.html).
35. Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security*, 20 (Spring 1996), 136-75, esp. 142; Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, "International Peace building: A Theoretical and Quantitative Analysis," *American Political Science Review*, 94 (December 2000).
36. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965); Jay Mallin, ed., *"Che" Guevara on Revolution* (Coral Gables, Fla.: Univ. of Miami Press, 1969).
37. Mark Frankel et al., "Boy Soldiers," *Newsweek*, 14 August 1995, p. 45.
38. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Girls with Guns: An Agenda on Child Soldiers for Beijing Plus Five," 4 June 2000, Internet, <http://www.child-soldiers.org/>.
39. Stohl, 1999. These countries include Angola, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Colombia, Congo-Brazzaville, Pakistan, Peru, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Uganda.
40. Keithley and Melshen, p. 91.
41. Human Rights Watch, *The Scars of Death: Children Abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda*, Human Rights Watch/Africa Children's Rights Project, September 1997, p. 7.
42. In Sierra Leone, RUF fighters were unintimidated by the light APCs of the UN force and even seized them from peacekeeping forces and repainted them for their own use.
43. For the soldiers' reaction, see Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), ch. 19.

### **Major Jim Gray Comments**

For the most part, Westerners cannot comprehend what it is like in many of the countries where children are fighting as soldiers. What is normal in these countries is far from anything that is normal in the West. In these countries, governments have broken down and are unable to enforce law and order, provide basic services such as water and electricity, or operate schools. Armed gangs, militias, and armies roam the cities and control traffic throughout the countryside. The citizens, especially the children, are victims to the disorder.

Why do children fight? Many are alienated from their home environments because they were forced to commit atrocities and cannot return. Others don't want to go home because as soldiers they are well fed, clothed, housed, and are hooked on the power of being a soldier. Because of limited adult populations in the prime military age group 18-40, children are used extensively as soldiers.

How do children fight? They often are not organized in any way and fight in a disjointed manner. They don't understand anything tactical, and they are not a cohesive force. They are just kids, but kids on drugs with weapons, playing as if they are on a playground. When attacked, they fight fiercely. Their leaders lead by fear.

After the initial shock of facing children as soldiers, US and western forces must do their jobs. Major Gray urges that training prepare them for this shock.

Upon returning home, US and western forces may not be able to cope with normal life, and may go through a period of post-traumatic stress disorder. Many will be deeply affected by what they saw. US and western military leaders must prepare the forces for the kind of environment they will face before they deploy on operations. They also must go through the process of discussing and understanding what they were exposed to upon redeployment. Similar efforts will be needed with the family members of returning service members before they return.



**Major Jim Gray Royal Marines  
British Embassy  
Washington DC**





Jim Gray **DOES NOT** speak on behalf of:

**The United Nations**

**UNOMSIL**

**The British Government**

**The Royal Marines**

**British Embassy**















## **1. Western Condemnation**

**Some Perspective?**

## **2. Why & How Children 'fight'**



### **3. And to us?**



**Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to continue despite it....**

**That's the easy bit, eventually you have to go home**



**Anon June  
2002**

United Nations A/54/L.84

# **General Assembly** Distr.: Limited

16 May 2000

Original: English

00-43478 (E) 170500

## **Fifty-fourth session**

Agenda item 116

### **Human rights questions**

#### **Draft resolution recommended by the Economic and Social Council**

#### **Optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

#### **on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the**

#### **sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography**

*The General Assembly, Recalling* all its previous resolutions on the rights of the child topic, and in particular its resolution

54/149 of 17 December 1999, in which it strongly supported the work of the open-ended inter-sessional working groups and urged them to finalize their work before the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1 Expressing

*its appreciation* to the Commission on Human Rights for having finalized the texts of the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution

and child pornography, *Conscious* of the tenth anniversaries, in the year 2000, of the World Summit for Children and the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the symbolic and practical importance of the adoption of the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child before the special session of the General Assembly for the follow-up to the World Summit for Children, to be convened in 2001,

*Adhering* to the principle that the best interests of the children are to be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, *Reaffirming its commitment* to strive for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child in all avenues of life, *Recognizing* that the adoption and implementation of the two optional protocols will make a substantial contribution to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child,

1. *Adopts* and opens for signature, ratification and accession the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1 on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the



sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the texts of which are annexed to the present resolution;

2. *Invites* all States that have signed, ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to sign and ratify or accede to the annexed optional protocols as soon as possible in order to facilitate their early entry into force;

3. *Decides* that the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child will be opened for signature at the special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender 1 Resolution 44/25, annex. 2 A/54/L.84

equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”, to be convened from 5 to 9 June 2000 in New York, and thereafter at United Nations Headquarters, at the special session of the General Assembly, entitled “World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world”, to be convened from 26 to 30 June 2000 in Geneva, and at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, to be convened from 6 to 8 September 2000 in New York;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to include information on the status of the two optional protocols in his regular report to the General Assembly on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

#### **Annex I**

#### **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict**

*The States Parties to the present Protocol,*  
*Encouraged* by the overwhelming support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1 demonstrating the widespread commitment that exists to strive for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child,  
*Reaffirming* that the rights of children require special protection, and calling for continuous improvement of the situation of children without distinction, as well as for their development and education in conditions of peace and security,  
*Disturbed* by the harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children and the long-term consequences this has for durable peace, security and development, *Condemning* the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict and direct attacks on

objects protected under international law, including places generally having a significant presence of children, such as schools and hospitals, *Noting* the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court 2 and, in particular, its inclusion as a war crime of conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years or using them to participate actively in hostilities in both international and non-international armed conflicts, *Considering*, therefore, that to strengthen further the implementation of rights recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child there is a need to increase the protection of children from involvement in armed conflict, *Noting* that article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies that, for the purposes of that Convention, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier, *Convinced* that an optional protocol to the Convention raising the age of possible recruitment of persons into armed forces and their participation in hostilities will contribute effectively to the implementation of the principle that the best interests of the child are to be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, *Noting* that the twenty-sixth international Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 1995 recommended, *inter alia*, that parties to conflict take every feasible step to ensure that children under the age of 18 years do not take part in hostilities, *Welcoming* the unanimous adoption, in June 1999, of International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which prohibits, *inter alia*, forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, *Condemning with the gravest concern* the recruitment, training and use within and across national borders of children in hostilities by armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a State, and recognizing the responsibility of those who recruit, train and use children in this regard, *Recalling* the obligation of each party to an armed conflict to abide by the provisions of international humanitarian law, *Stressing* that this Protocol is without prejudice to the purposes and principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations, including Article 51, and relevant norms of humanitarian law, *Bearing in mind* that conditions of peace and security based on full respect of the purposes and

principles contained in the Charter and observance of applicable human rights instruments are indispensable 2 A/CONF.183/9. 3 A/54/L.84

for the full protection of children, in particular during armed conflicts and foreign occupation, *Recognizing* the special needs of those children who are particularly vulnerable to recruitment or use in hostilities contrary to this Protocol owing to their economic or social status or gender, *Mindful* of the necessity of taking into consideration the economic, social and political root causes of the involvement of children in armed conflicts, *Convinced* of the need to strengthen international cooperation in the implementation of this Protocol, as well as the physical and psychosocial rehabilitation and social reintegration of children who are victims of armed conflict, *Encouraging* the participation of the community and, in particular, children and child victims in the dissemination of informational and educational programmes concerning the implementation of the Protocol, *Have agreed* as follows:

#### **Article 1**

States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take a direct part in hostilities.

#### **Article 2**

States Parties shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces.

#### **Article 3**

1. States Parties shall raise the minimum age for the voluntary recruitment of persons into their national armed forces from that set out in article 38, paragraph 3, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>1</sup> taking account of the principles contained in that article and recognizing that under the Convention persons under 18 are entitled to special protection.
2. Each State Party shall deposit a binding declaration upon ratification of or accession to this Protocol that sets forth the minimum age at which it will permit voluntary recruitment into its national armed forces and a description of the safeguards that it has adopted to ensure that such recruitment is not forced or coerced.
3. States Parties that permit voluntary recruitment into their national armed forces under the age of 18 shall maintain safeguards to ensure, as a minimum,

that:

- (a) Such recruitment is genuinely voluntary;
- (b) Such recruitment is done with the informed consent of the person's parents or legal guardians;
- (c) Such persons are fully informed of the duties involved in such military service;
- (d) Such persons provide reliable proof of age prior to acceptance into national military service.

4. Each State Party may strengthen its declaration at any time by notification to that effect addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall inform all States Parties. Such notification shall take effect on the date on which it is received by the Secretary-General.

5. The requirement to raise the age in paragraph 1 of the present article does not apply to schools operated by or under the control of the armed forces of the States Parties, in keeping with articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

#### **Article 4**

1. Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a State should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years.

2. States Parties shall take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and use, including the adoption of legal measures necessary to prohibit and criminalize such practices.

3. The application of the present article under this Protocol shall not affect the legal status of any party to an armed conflict.

#### **Article 5**

Nothing in the present Protocol shall be construed as precluding provisions in the law of a State Party or in international instruments and international humanitarian law that are more conducive to the *realization of the rights of the child*.<sup>4</sup>

**A/54/L.84**

#### **Article 6**

1. Each State Party shall take all necessary legal, administrative and other measures to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of the provisions of this Protocol within its jurisdiction.

2. States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the present Protocol widely known and promoted by appropriate means, to adults and

children alike.

3. States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons within their jurisdiction recruited or used in hostilities contrary to this Protocol are demobilized or otherwise released from service. States Parties shall, when necessary, accord to these persons all appropriate assistance for their physical and psychological recovery and their social reintegration.

#### **Article 7**

1. States Parties shall cooperate in the implementation of the present Protocol, including in the prevention of any activity contrary to the Protocol and in the rehabilitation and social reintegration of persons who are victims of acts contrary to this Protocol, including through technical cooperation and financial assistance. Such assistance and cooperation will be undertaken in consultation with concerned States Parties and relevant international organizations.

2. States Parties in a position to do so shall provide such assistance through existing multilateral, bilateral or other programmes, or, *inter alia*, through a voluntary fund established in accordance with the rules of the General Assembly.

#### **Article 8**

1. Each State Party shall submit, within two years following the entry into force of the Protocol for that State Party, a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child providing comprehensive information on the measures it has taken to implement the provisions of the Protocol, including the measures taken to implement the provisions on participation and recruitment.

2. Following the submission of the comprehensive report, each State Party shall include in the reports they submit to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in accordance with article 44 of the Convention, any further information with respect to the implementation of the Protocol. Other States Parties to the Protocol shall submit a report every five years.

3. The Committee on the Rights of the Child may request from States Parties further information relevant to the implementation of this Protocol.

#### **Article 9**

1. The present Protocol is open for signature by any State that is a party to the Convention or has signed it.

2. The present Protocol is subject to ratification and

is open to accession by any State. Instruments of ratification or accession shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

3. The Secretary-General, in his capacity as depositary of the Convention and the Protocol, shall inform all States Parties to the Convention and all States that have signed the Convention of each instrument of declaration pursuant to article 13.

#### **Article 10**

1. The present Protocol shall enter into force three months after the deposit of the tenth instrument of ratification or accession.

2. For each State ratifying the present Protocol or acceding to it after its entry into force, the present Protocol shall enter into force one month after the date of the deposit of its own instrument of ratification or accession.

#### **Article 11**

1. Any State Party may denounce the present Protocol at any time by written notification to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall thereafter inform the other States Parties to the Convention and all States that have signed the Convention. The denunciation shall take effect one year after the date of receipt of the notification by the Secretary-General. If, however, on the expiry of that year the denouncing State Party is engaged in armed conflict, the denunciation shall not take effect before the end of the armed conflict.

2. Such a denunciation shall not have the effect of releasing the State Party from its obligations under the present Protocol in regard to any act that occurs prior to the date on which the denunciation becomes

*effective. Nor shall such a denunciation prejudice in 5 A/54/L.84*

any way the continued consideration of any matter that is already under consideration by the Committee prior to the date on which the denunciation becomes effective.

#### **Article 12**

1. Any State Party may propose an amendment and file it with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Secretary-General shall thereupon communicate the proposed amendment to States Parties, with a request that they indicate whether they favour a conference of States Parties for the purpose of

considering and voting upon the proposals. In the event that, within four months from the date of such communication, at least one third of the States Parties favour such a conference, the Secretary-General shall convene the conference under the auspices of the United Nations. Any amendment adopted by a majority of States Parties present and voting at the conference shall be submitted to the General Assembly for approval.

2. An amendment adopted in accordance with paragraph 1 of the present article shall enter into force when it has been approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations and accepted by a two-thirds majority of States Parties.

3. When an amendment enters into force, it shall be binding on those States Parties that have accepted it, other States Parties still being bound by the provisions of the present Protocol and any earlier amendments that they have accepted.

#### **Article 13**

1. The present Protocol, of which the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited in the archives of the United Nations.

2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall transmit certified copies of the present Protocol to all States Parties to the Convention and all States that have signed the Convention.

#### **Annex II**

##### **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography**

*The States Parties to the present Protocol, Considering that, in order further to achieve the purposes of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1 and the implementation of its provisions, especially articles 1, 11, 21, 32, 33, 34, 35 and 36, it would be appropriate to extend the measures that States Parties should undertake in order to guarantee the protection of the child from the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Considering also that the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical,*

mental, spiritual, moral or social development, *Gravely concerned* at the significant and increasing international traffic of children for the purpose of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, *Deeply concerned* at the widespread and continuing practice of sex tourism, to which children are especially vulnerable, as it directly promotes the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, *Recognizing* that a number of particularly vulnerable groups, including girl children, are at greater risk of sexual exploitation, and that girl children are disproportionately represented among the sexually exploited, *Concerned* about the growing availability of child pornography on the Internet and other evolving technologies, and recalling the International Conference on Combating Child Pornography on the Internet (Vienna, 1999) and, in particular, its conclusion calling for the worldwide criminalization of the production, distribution, exportation, transmission, importation, intentional possession and advertising of child pornography, and stressing the importance of closer cooperation and partnership between Governments and the Internet industry, *Believing* that the elimination of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography will be facilitated by adopting a holistic approach, addressing the contributing factors, including underdevelopment, poverty, economic disparities, inequitable socio-economic structure, dysfunctioning families, lack of education, urban-rural migration, **6 A/54/L.84** gender discrimination, irresponsible adult sexual behaviour, harmful traditional practices, armed conflicts and trafficking of children, *Believing* that efforts to raise public awareness are needed to reduce consumer demand for the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and also believing in the importance of strengthening global partnership among all actors and of improving law enforcement at the national level, *Noting* the provisions of international legal instruments relevant to the protection of children, including the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation with Respect to Inter-Country Adoption, the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, the Hague Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law,



Recognition, Enforcement and Cooperation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children, and International Labour Organization Convention No. 182 on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, *Encouraged* by the overwhelming support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, demonstrating the widespread commitment that exists for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, *Recognizing* the importance of the implementation of the provisions of the Programme of Action for the Prevention of the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography 3 and the Declaration and Agenda for Action adopted at the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held at Stockholm from 27 to 31 August 1996, 4 and the other relevant decisions and recommendations of pertinent international bodies, *Taking due account* of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child, *Have agreed* as follows:

#### **Article 1**

States Parties shall prohibit the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography as provided for by the present Protocol.

#### **Article 2**

For the purpose of the present Protocol:

- (a) Sale of children means any act or transaction whereby a child is transferred by any person or group of persons to another for remuneration or any other consideration;
- (b) Child prostitution means the use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration;
- (c) Child pornography means any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes.

#### **Article 3**

1. Each State Party shall ensure that, as a minimum, the following acts and activities are fully covered under its criminal or penal law, whether these offences are committed domestically or transnationally or on an individual or organized basis:

- (a) In the context of sale of children as defined

in article 2:

- (i) The offering, delivering or accepting, by whatever means, a child for the purpose of:
    - a. Sexual exploitation of the child;
    - b. Transfer of organs of the child for profit;
    - c. Engagement of the child in forced labour;
  - (ii) Improperly inducing consent, as an intermediary, for the adoption of a child in violation of applicable international legal instruments on adoption;
  - (b) Offering, obtaining, procuring or providing a child for child prostitution, as defined in article 2;
  - (c) Producing, distributing, disseminating, importing, exporting, offering, selling or possessing for
- 3 Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1992, Supplement No. 2 (E/1992/22), chap. II, sect. A, resolution 1992/74, annex. 4 A/51/385, annex. 7 A/54/L.84*

the above purposes child pornography as defined in article 2.

2. Subject to the provisions of a State Party's national law, the same shall apply to an attempt to commit any of these acts and to complicity or participation in any of these acts.

3. Each State Party shall make these offences punishable by appropriate penalties that take into account their grave nature.

4. Subject to the provisions of its national law, each State Party shall take measures, where appropriate, to establish the liability of legal persons for offences established in paragraph 1 of the present article. Subject to the legal principles of the State Party, this liability of legal persons may be criminal, civil or administrative.

5. States Parties shall take all appropriate legal and administrative measures to ensure that all persons involved in the adoption of a child act in conformity with applicable international legal instruments.

#### **Article 4**

1. Each State Party shall take such measures as may be necessary to establish its jurisdiction over the offences referred to in article 3, paragraph 1, when the offences are committed in its territory or on board a ship or aircraft registered in that State.

2. Each State Party may take such measures as may be necessary to establish its jurisdiction over the offences referred to in article 3, paragraph 1, in the following cases:

(a) When the alleged offender is a national of that State or a person who has his habitual residence in its territory;

(b) When the victim is a national of that State.

3. Each State Party shall also take such measures as may be necessary to establish its jurisdiction over the above-mentioned offences when the alleged offender is present in its territory and it does not extradite him or her to another State Party on the ground that the offence has been committed by one of its nationals.

4. This Protocol does not exclude any criminal jurisdiction exercised in accordance with internal law.

#### **Article 5**

1. The offences referred to in article 3, paragraph 1, shall be deemed to be included as extraditable offences in any extradition treaty existing between States Parties and shall be included as extraditable offences in every extradition treaty subsequently concluded between them, in accordance with the conditions set forth in those treaties.

2. If a State Party that makes extradition conditional on the existence of a treaty receives a request for extradition from another State Party with which it has no extradition treaty, it may consider this Protocol as a legal basis for extradition in respect of such offences. Extradition shall be subject to the conditions provided by the law of the requested State.

3. States Parties that do not make extradition conditional on the existence of a treaty shall recognize such offences as extraditable offences between themselves subject to the conditions provided by the law of the requested State.

4. Such offences shall be treated, for the purpose of extradition between States Parties, as if they had been committed not only in the place in which they occurred but also in the territories of the States required to establish their jurisdiction in accordance with article 4.

5. If an extradition request is made with respect to an offence described in article 3, paragraph 1, and if the requested State Party does not or will not extradite on the basis of the nationality of the offender, that State shall take suitable measures to submit the case to its

competent authorities for the purpose of prosecution.

#### **Article 6**

1. States Parties shall afford one another the greatest measure of assistance in connection with investigations or criminal or extradition proceedings brought in respect of the offences set forth in article 3, paragraph 1, including assistance in obtaining evidence at their disposal necessary for the proceedings.

2. States Parties shall carry out their obligations under paragraph 1 of the present article in conformity with any treaties or other arrangements on mutual legal assistance that may exist between them. In the absence of such treaties or arrangements, States Parties shall afford one another assistance in accordance with their *domestic law* <sup>8</sup>

**A/54/L.84**

#### **Article 7**

States Parties shall, subject to the provisions of their national law:

- (a) Take measures to provide for the seizure and confiscation, as appropriate, of:
  - (i) Goods such as materials, assets and other instrumentalities used to commit or facilitate offences under the present protocol;
  - (ii) Proceeds derived from such offences;
- (b) Execute requests from another State Party for seizure or confiscation of goods or proceeds referred to in subparagraph (a) (i);
- (c) Take measures aimed at closing, on a temporary or definitive basis, premises used to commit such offences.

#### **Article 8**

1. States Parties shall adopt appropriate measures to protect the rights and interests of child victims of the practices prohibited under the present Protocol at all stages of the criminal justice process, in particular by:

- (a) Recognizing the vulnerability of child victims and adapting procedures to recognize their special needs, including their special needs as witnesses;
- (b) Informing child victims of their rights, their role and the scope, timing and progress of the proceedings and of the disposition of their cases;
- (c) Allowing the views, needs and concerns of child victims to be presented and considered in proceedings where their personal interests are affected,

in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law;

(d) Providing appropriate support services to child victims throughout the legal process;

(e) Protecting, as appropriate, the privacy and identity of child victims and taking measures in accordance with national law to avoid the inappropriate dissemination of information that could lead to the identification of child victims;

(f) Providing, in appropriate cases, for the safety of child victims, as well as that of their families and witnesses on their behalf, from intimidation and retaliation;

(g) Avoiding unnecessary delay in the disposition of cases and the execution of orders or decrees granting compensation to child victims.

2. States Parties shall ensure that uncertainty as to the actual age of the victim shall not prevent the initiation of criminal investigations, including investigations aimed at establishing the age of the victim.

3. States Parties shall ensure that, in the treatment by the criminal justice system of children who are victims of the offences described in the present Protocol, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration.

4. States Parties shall take measures to ensure appropriate training, in particular legal and psychological training, for the persons who work with victims of the offences prohibited under the present Protocol.

5. States Parties shall, in appropriate cases, adopt measures in order to protect the safety and integrity of those persons and/or organizations involved in the prevention and/or protection and rehabilitation of victims of such offences.

6. Nothing in the present article shall be construed as prejudicial to or inconsistent with the rights of the accused to a fair and impartial trial.

#### **Article 9**

1. States Parties shall adopt or strengthen, implement and disseminate laws, administrative measures, social policies and programmes to prevent the offences referred to in the present Protocol. Particular attention shall be given to protect children who are especially vulnerable to these practices.

2. States Parties shall promote awareness in the public at large, including children, through information by all appropriate means, education and training, about the preventive measures and harmful effects of the offences referred to in the present Protocol. In fulfilling their obligations under this article, States Parties shall encourage the participation of the community and, in particular, children and child victims, in such information and education and training programmes, including at the international level.

3. States Parties shall take all feasible measures with *the aim of ensuring all appropriate assistance to* **9 A/54/L.84**

victims of such offences, including their full social reintegration and their full physical and psychological recovery.

4. States Parties shall ensure that all child victims of the offences described in the present Protocol have access to adequate procedures to seek, without discrimination, compensation for damages from those legally responsible.

5. States Parties shall take appropriate measures aimed at effectively prohibiting the production and dissemination of material advertising the offences described in the present Protocol.

#### **Article 10**

1. States Parties shall take all necessary steps to strengthen international cooperation by multilateral, regional and bilateral arrangements for the prevention, detection, investigation, prosecution and punishment of those responsible for acts involving the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and child sex tourism. States Parties shall also promote international cooperation and coordination between their authorities, national and international non-governmental organizations and international organizations.

2. States Parties shall promote international cooperation to assist child victims in their physical and psychological recovery, social reintegration and repatriation.

3. States Parties shall promote the strengthening of international cooperation in order to address the root causes, such as poverty and underdevelopment, contributing to the vulnerability of children to the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography and child sex tourism.

4. States Parties in a position to do so shall provide financial, technical or other assistance through existing multilateral, regional, bilateral or other programmes.

#### **Article 11**

Nothing in the present Protocol shall affect any provisions that are more conducive to the realization of the rights of the child and that may be contained in:

- (a) The law of a State Party;
- (b) International law in force for that State.

#### **Article 12**

1. Each State Party shall submit, within two years following the entry into force of the Protocol for that State Party, a report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child providing comprehensive information on the measures it has taken to implement the provisions of the Protocol.
2. Following the submission of the comprehensive report, each State Party shall include in the reports they submit to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in accordance with article 44 of the Convention, any further information with respect to the implementation of the Protocol. Other States Parties to the Protocol shall submit a report every five years.
3. The Committee on the Rights of the Child may request from States Parties further information relevant to the implementation of this Protocol.

#### **Article 13**

1. The present Protocol is open for signature by any State that is a party to the Convention or has signed it.
2. The present Protocol is subject to ratification and is open to accession by any State that is a party to the Convention or has signed it. Instruments of ratification or accession shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

#### **Article 14**

1. The present Protocol shall enter into force three months after the deposit of the tenth instrument of ratification or accession.
2. For each State ratifying the present Protocol or acceding to it after its entry into force, the present Protocol shall enter into force one month after the date of the deposit of its own instrument of ratification or accession.

#### **Article 15**

1. Any State Party may denounce the present Protocol at any time by written notification to the

Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall thereafter inform the other States Parties to the Convention and all States that have signed the Convention. The denunciation shall take effect one year after the date of receipt of the notification by the *Secretary-General of the United Nations*. **10**

**A/54/L.84**

2. Such a denunciation shall not have the effect of releasing the State Party from its obligations under this Protocol in regard to any offence that occurs prior to the date on which the denunciation becomes effective. Nor shall such a denunciation prejudice in any way the continued consideration of any matter that is already under consideration by the Committee prior to the date on which the denunciation becomes effective.

**Article 16**

1. Any State Party may propose an amendment and file it with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Secretary-General shall thereupon communicate the proposed amendment to States Parties, with a request that they indicate whether they favour a conference of States Parties for the purpose of considering and voting upon the proposals. In the event that, within four months from the date of such communication, at least one third of the States Parties favour such a conference, the Secretary-General shall convene the conference under the auspices of the United Nations. Any amendment adopted by a majority of States Parties present and voting at the conference shall be submitted to the General Assembly for approval.

2. An amendment adopted in accordance with paragraph 1 of the present article shall enter into force when it has been approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations and accepted by a two-thirds majority of States Parties.

3. When an amendment enters into force, it shall be binding on those States Parties that have accepted it, other States Parties still being bound by the provisions of the present Protocol and any earlier amendments that they have accepted.

**Article 17**

1. The present Protocol, of which the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited in the archives of the United Nations.



2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall transmit certified copies of the present Protocol to all States Parties to the Convention and all States that *have signed the Convention*.